

# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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# THE BRONZE STATUE MURDERS

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by **TALMAGE POWELL**

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# MIKE SHAYNE



## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1976  
VOL. 39, NO. 2

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

### THE BRONZE STATUE MURDERS

by BRETT HALLIDAY

*The Lysippus figurine would fit inside a hat—but despite its small size, the precious antique was worth a minimal one million dollars on the hoof. It was Shayne's job to deliver it to the purchaser and collect the cash for a five-grand fee. It looked like a milk run until the buyer refused payment on the grounds that the Lysippus was a fake—and then it became his job to find both the original and the thief. This proved far more difficult—and far more deadly as the deaths began . . . . . 2 to 55*

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# The Bronze Statue Murders

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by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

*Following the trail of the vanished ancient Greek statuette takes Shayne as far as New Mexico. But the clue to the murderous million dollar antique lies more than two thousand miles closer to home.*

MIKE SHAYNE FLOWED with the football crowd into the Orange Bowl. He looked at ease but his grey eyes were busy as he sifted the humanity. He was looking for an intent face. It might be a familiar face, one from far back in his past, or that of a stranger. In his book, the attacker could be anyone, and the move could come from any direction.

Most likely from behind him.

He turned out of the crowd to a wall of the stadium, making the move quickly. Swiftly he

inventoried the myriad faces flowing toward and past him, watching for a sudden jerk, some goon curving off also to brace against a wall.

The faces continued to flow past. No one appeared particularly interested in him. The general intent seemed to be on reaching a seat from where one could bellow encouragement to the Miami Dolphins as they kicked hell out of the New England Pats this bright Sunday afternoon.

Shayne lighted a cigaret,

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Featuring

## MIKE SHAYNE

---



cupping the match flame in large hands, his grey eyes dancing. He snapped out the flame, drew smoke deep into his lungs and slid back into the glut of human traffic.

Football for the masses—rendezvous for the redheaded private detective...

Two unsigned notes had arrived in the Friday mail delivery at his Flagler Street office.

One had been penciled in crude block letters. It read, **YOUR DEAD SHANE.**

The other had been neatly typed and was folded around a single ticket to the football game. It read, *Use of the enclosed ticket will lead you to a \$5,000 retainer, cash, paid in advance.*

Shayne grunted and sat back in the chair behind his desk, the crude note in his left hand, the typed lure in his right. He glanced up at his secretary, Lucy Hamilton, who hovered at his left shoulder, a light frown wrinkling her brow as she studied the notes.

"For one thing, Michael," she said, touching the tip of a pert nose with a pencil eraser, "someone doesn't know the difference between *your* and *you're*. For another, the writer misspelled your name."

Shayne flipped the crude note aside, lifted the other. "The hell with the crazie," he said gruffly. "What do you think about this?"

"Interesting," Lucy said slowly, "but don't be so flippant about the other. It might not be from a crazie. You *have* made enemies through the years."

Shayne was never flippant. He might feign—which he often did in an effort to put Lucy's mind at ease—but he never totally disregarded. This was why

he was alert in the football crowd. Assassins used crowds.

Three-fourths of his stadium seat was in use when he arrived. A blubbery-looking, pink, polished man grunted and moved a few inches to his left. A drab woman of fifty shot him a piercing look, then shifted hips to her right. Shayne wedged his solid frame between them, tipped back his hat and waited for the man to introduce himself.

The man smiled. "Er—do you happen to have an extra cigaret?"

Shayne offered his pack as the woman said, "My name, Mr. Shayne, is Tina Mikken-Bush. Under ordinary circumstances I would have asked for an appointment at your office."

The man to Shayne's left said, "A—I don't seem to have a match, either."

Shayne passed him the book, turned his full attention to the woman. Mikken-Bush was a name in small print on the bottom of television and movie screens (A Mikken-Bush Production), in newspaper ads (A Mikken-Bush Corporation) stamped on jet airliners and computers.

"Please," said the woman, staring off across the stadium, "act as if we are not conversing. I may have been followed here

and I prefer no one know you are in my employ."

"So far I'm not," said Shayne.

She slipped five folded bills into his right hand. "I've had you investigated. I was impressed with the dossier. I need you, Mr. Shayne."

"To do what?"

"Make a delivery for me and collect a million."

## II

TINA MIKKEN-BUSH was disposing of an inherited art collection that had been put together over years of astute maneuvering by her deceased father. The bulk of the collection had been sold at auction. Two paintings and a tiny bronze statuette had not. The value of each demanded private sale. The two paintings were gone and now there was only the statuette. Terms of its sale had been reached but there remained the delivery and the collection.

Shayne rolled with his thoughts through the balmy Miami evening toward his second appointment with Tina Mikken-Bush. It was scheduled for 7:45 p.m. at the Mikken-Bush mansion. He was to pick up the valuable statuette, take it to a motel unit across the city, collect the one million and return to the mansion with the money.

There were only four potential legitimate buyers of the statuette in the world, Tina Mikken-Bush had said—a Netherlands combine, a Japanese combine, a South American coffee magnate named Juan Zimmerman and the Miami investor, Oswald Foly. But there were plenty of potential thieves. And word of the statuette offering was out. So the thieves could be lurking in shadows, watching, waiting for the sale transaction.

It would be one of the few times the statuette was out of a safe, accessible. The thieves could pounce during the passing of the statuette from one hand to another.

Tina Mikken-Bush and representatives of the successful bidder, the Hollanders, intended to lessen this potential by shrouding their moves in secrecy and employing Shayne—a nonentity in the art world—to make the delivery and collection.

Mike Shayne slowed his powerful Buick as he neared the Mikken-Bush estate. He concentrated on the quiet street, inventorying intently. The light of day was fading but shadows had not yet formed.

He saw nothing suspicious—no parked cars, no loiterers. He turned the Buick into the Mikken-Bush driveway, coasted

up to a sprawling house and braked. He sat for a few moments surveying the colorful surroundings. Someone had put the grounds together with a slide rule.

Tina Mikken-Bush opened the door of the house before the detective reached it. She stepped back quickly and ushered him into quiet elegance. "Right on time, Mr. Shayne," she said, brushing a strand of hair from her cheek with a heavily-veined hand. "Thank you. Do you think anyone followed you here?"

"I wasn't followed," he assured her.

"We are nearing a particularly dangerous time," she said. "Exposure. Out of the safe, the—"

With some clients the detective would have casually opened his coat, allowing a reassuring glimpse of the large .45 in his shoulder rig. But in the Mikken-Bush home he merely interrupted. "You have paid five thousand dollars for its protection."

"Yes." She nodded curtly, turned into the deep foyer. Shayne walked beside her. He was frowning as they moved on silent footsteps toward a wide stairwell. He had expected to be met and ushered in by a domestic. The mansion called for domestics. But perhaps ser-

vants were not to see the detective.

At the foot of the stairwell, Tina Mikken-Bush moved through an open doorway into a vast richly-appointed library. To the detective's right was a wide closed wall drape. Straight ahead a pair of modernistic couches sandwiched a low marble table. A stony-looking couple sat in silence in deep chairs to his left.

The woman looked five to seven years younger but bore a strong resemblance to his client. She was long and narrow, too, had the same sharp facial features. But she seemed extremely nervous. Her eyes jumped constantly and she appeared unsure of what to do with her hands.

The man was forty to forty-five, flat and tanned. He wore a precise white-black mustache, waxed at the points, and he sat quietly. He looked healthy, but Shayne had a hunch he was soft as custard pudding.

"My sister, Myra, and her husband, Phelps Baxter," said Tina Mikken-Bush. It was not an introduction.

She moved to the wall drape, produced a tiny flat key from her palm. She pushed an edge of the drape back slightly and inserted the key into the edge of a ceiling-to-floor door frame. Then she went to a wall pic-

ture, swung it open to the door of a combination safe. She dialed the knob, opened the safe, reached inside to another dial, twisted and turned it, finally opened the second door. She took a flat black case from the safe and returned to Shayne.

She palmed the case in her left hand and opened the spring lid with her right. Mike Shayne glanced at the statuette. It was bronze, seemed to represent a young Greek runner in a victorious pose after a race.

"It is a Lysippus," said Tina Mikken-Bush. "A masterpiece by the Greek sculptor, probably out of the fourth century, B.C. It is the only one known to exist."

"Okay," Shayne said.

She pushed the case toward him. He removed the statuette. She looked mildly surprised. He put the statuette on the top of his skull and clomped on his hat.

"I leave here with something in hand or sticking out of my pocket and people could be suspicious if somebody is outside watching," said the redhead.

He turned, glanced at the couple in the chairs. They eyed him intently. The woman looked slightly drawn, the man was tight-hipped. Shayne lifted a hand to them and strode from the library, Tina Mikken-Bush scurrying along at his side.



Movement in the corner of Shayne's eye stopped him in the foyer. He glanced up the wide stairwell. Another woman had appeared. She came down the staircase slowly, stopped three steps from the bottom and stared. She was another version of Tina Mikken-Bush, but much younger, and looked as if she might be on the edge of a cloud. A mechanical smile lay fixed on her face. Her eyes were dead. She didn't move, merely stared. The redhead had a suspicion she wasn't seeing anything.

"Laura," said Tina Mikken-Bush. "Is there something...?"

The woman on the stairwell said nothing, didn't bat an eyelid.

Tina Mikken-Bush led Shayne toward the front door. "My youngest sister," she said. At the door she put a hand on the detective's arm. "You have the motel name, the unit number, but remember, if you suspect you are being followed, avoid the motel, go to your home, telephone. You have our private number."

"I won't be followed," the detective said, confident.

He drove away from the mansion at a leisurely pace. The street was quiet. No headlights leaped alive in his rear-view mirror, no powerful cars whipped up beside him, attempted to crush the Buck

against a curbing. He eased across the city and turned in at a medium-priced motel. Darkness prevailed now but the motel was well-lighted. He spotted the unit he wanted and braked beside a small sedan.

He got out of the Buick and took a deep breath as he looked around. There were no suspicious loiterers in the vicinity. He went to the unit door and knocked. The door was opened immediately by a short round man of middle years with thin blond hair combed straight back and very small eyes. The eyes were behind glasses as thick as Coke bottle bottoms.

The man stepped back in silence, the thick glasses hanging on Shayne as the detective entered the unit. There were two other men in the room. They were large men, youthful, stoic of face and strategically placed, spread as wide as the room would allow, one to the detective's left, one to his right. They looked ready to pounce.

Shayne looked straight at the short round man. "Van Loot," he said. He glanced right and left. "Borge, Franz."

"Pierce," the man wearing the thick glasses said.

It was done. Passwrods given, acknowledged. Everyone knew everyone else was the right party.

Shayne took off his hat and

handed the statuette to the round man. "I believe there is to be an exchange," he said, looking around for a suitcase, a package, anything that might contain a million.

But the round man studied the statuette, ran his fingers over it, touched the face, the underside of its arms and legs. He might have been molding clay. Then, without looking up, he said, "Seize him!"

### III

BORGE AND FRANZ were swift. They looped in on Shayne and pinned his arms. Expert hands moved swiftly over the detective's body. Fingers hesitated on the bulge of the .45, moved on, left the gun in its holster.

Finally Borge said, "He has a gun. Nothing else."

The round man eyed Shayne hotly for a few seconds before extending the statuette. He ordered, "Release him."

Shayne grabbed the bronze. "What the hell gives, pal?"

"I, too, would like to know, Mr. Shayne," said the round man. "That object in your hand is a crude fake."

Shayne hefted the weight, glanced at it.

"Miss Mikken-Bush is aware we could not be deceived, so I am puzzled by her intentions," the round man went on. "How-

ever, you may tell her for me that we still are interested in obtaining any bronze definitely attributed to Lysippus."

He paused, pulled his lower lip. "Of course, after this bit of attempted deception, the price will be lower."

"Yeah," said Shayne as he turned to the unit door. Thoughts tumbled inside his head. "I'll tell her."

"Unless. . ."

The round man let the word hang behind the detective. Shayne turned from the door, eyed him hard. Van Loot wore a crafty look. "Perhaps *you* are now in the market to make a sale, Mr. Shayne? Possible?"

"You're making funny noises," the detective replied.

"I see." Van Loot nodded, took a card from a vest pocket, passed the card to Shayne. "You will note that is a long distance telephone number, nothing else," he said. "Should you reconsider later, call that number. It will get you a Mr. Fox, day or night. Mr. Fox will be in touch with me, and perhaps we can make some arrangements."

Shayne said nothing, continued to stare at the man. Van Loot lifted his hands in a slight shrug. "Come up with the real Lysippus, Mr. Shayne, and the price will be right. Your choice, of course."

"Question," fired Shayne. "Could Mikken-Bush, the old man, have been hoodwinked a long time ago? Could *he* have purchased an imitation?"

Van Loot said, "Arthur Mikken-Bush was an expert. In addition, I saw the real Lysippus in the Mikken-Bush home last Wednesday evening. It was on display while Miss Mikken-Bush was accepting sealed bids."

"But maybe you were looking at this," Shayne suggested, holding the statuette aloft.

Van Loot shook his head. "You know the Lysippus by *touch*, Mr. Shayne. There are certain characteristics."

"And you touched it last Wednesday evening."

"I did."

"You and how many others?"

"There were myself and a representative of a Japanese group present in addition to Mr. Zimmerman, who resides in Rio, and Mr. Foly, who resides in this city."

The detective was grim as he returned to the Mikken-Bush mansion. And Tina Mikken-Bush looked totally baffled when she ushered him inside and saw the statuette in his hand. After he explained, she went rigid with disbelief.

She took the statuette from him and walked into the library. He trailed her. She re-

layed Shayne's words to Phelps and Myra Baxter. Myra became fluttery, squirmed, her eyes and hands dancing. Baxter sat rammed back in a chair. It was as if an electric shock had pinned him there.

Tina Mikken-Bush was the first to shake herself down. She went to one of the couches flanking the marble coffee table, sat stiffly on a cushion edge, the statuette clamped tightly in her lap. "Obviously, Mr. Shayne," she said finally, "we are the victims of theft."

"Something isn't kosher," he agreed.

"I wish to employ you," she said swiftly. "Another five thousand dollars to discover the culprit—and a ten thousand dollar bonus should you be able to return the real Lysippus."

"Tina..." Phelps Baxter had moved. He sat hunched forward now, elbows braced on the arms of the chair, fingertips steepled under the point of his jaw.

"Perhaps," he offered in a voice that broke, "Mr. Van Loot is reneging."

"Among these people, Phelps," she replied coldly, "a price is a price. There is no reneging."

Shayne put in, "Van Loot knew instantly that thing in your hand is an imitation. How come you didn't?"

"No one in this house is an

art expert, Mr. Shayne. None of us has the interest. The real statuette was in the safe last Wednesday. I had bidders in that evening. Each verified—"

"I know," said Shayne, waving her off. "So Van Loot said. Could one of them have pulled a switch on you, exchanged a substitute for the real Lysippus?"

along his jawline. "Not even if they are outbid?"

She continued to shake her head.

"Van Loot made a pitch," the detective said. "He figured I might have lifted the real thing between here and the motel. He gave me a telephone number to call in case I had, and in case I wanted to sell."



She shook her head. "Impossible. I didn't take my eyes off the bronze all of the time it was out of the safe."

"Not even to light a cigarette, to—"

"No!" She was emphatic. "In addition, these men do not steal. They don't have to."

Shayne ran a thumbnail

Tina Mikken-Bush said flatly, "These people will *purchase* from any source, Mr. Shayne, but they do not steal."

"Which gets us to others."

"Yes," she said slowly. She bit her lower lip, then continued, "Naturally, it has been known for weeks among collectors that we were offering the

Lysippus. It is how we attract bidders. We send word to the potential buyers and, of course, that word spreads. Too, the collectors' circle is not without its unscrupulous people, those who will steal. It is these people I have been wary of. They are why I employed you."

Shayne said, "Strong-arming a delivery boy is one thing— theft from a home is something else."

He went to the wall drape, opened it to a wide sliding door that opened onto a patio area. He studied the door inside and out. The lock looked sturdy. There were no tell-tale scratches around it. The door had not been jimmied.

He found the key slit in the door frame, ran a thumb over its smoothness. "Is this part of an electrical circuit to the safe?"

Tina Mikken-Bush nodded.

"You insert the key and that breaks the circuit, allows the safe to be opened without triggering an alarm?"

"Yes," said the woman.

"And where is the key kept?"

"In another safe in my bedroom. Are you speculating that a thief has entered the house and—"

"Not a run-of-the-mill B-and-E man, Miss Mikken-Bush," Shayne interrupted. "He would be looking for anything

of value. He wouldn't bring along a substitute bronze. The man or woman we want knew what he or she was after, where it was, knew about the electrical circuit, had devised a method to bypass it, used the substitute to gain time.

"Last Wednesday evening— was the bronze on display when the bidders arrived or did you remove it from the safe after they were here?"

"They were present when I removed it."

"And watched you use the key."

"Yes."

"How many people live in this house?"

Tina Mikken-Bush briefly stiffened, frowned. Then she said, "I do. Myra and Phelps and Laura and—" she paused. "—at the present time, Mr. Socrates."

"Mr. Socrates?"

"Laura's... friend. He is a house guest. He has been for several weeks. He—" Tina Mikken-Bush cut off the words with a flick of her fingers. "Never mind, Mr. Shayne. Mr. Socrates is not involved. It is sufficient to say he is a house guest."

"Where's Laura now? Isn't she a part of all of this? How come she's not involved in this little powwow?"

"Laura has retired."

It was a cold, flat statement, not to be questioned.

"Socrates?"

"Probably in his room, reading. He often reads late in the evening."

"Any domestics living in?"

"Yes. We have a butler, a maid and a cook."

"Where are *they*?"

"Walter, the butler, has retired. I presume. The maid and the cook have gone out. I dismissed all of them for the evening after dinner."

"Any of them new?"

"No. Each has been with the family for years."

"How many of the live-ins know the combination to the safe?"

Tina Mikken-Bush frowned. "I do, naturally," she said slowly. "*Myra, Phelps*—perhaps, *Laura*."

"*Perhaps* *Laura*?"

"She might or might not remember the combinations. Mr. Shayne, I don't understand your line of thinking. I don't—"

"How about the servants?" He asked.

"Know the combinations? Certainly not!"

"Was the *Lysippus* insured?"

"No. It was too valuable. No insurance company would—"

"*Figures*." Shayne interrupted again. Suddenly, he shoved back his hat with a thumb. "Okay, you want me to

take the case? You want me to find your Bronze Boy?"

She said, "Yes."

"It could hurt you," he warned. "I could find a thief in this house."

Tina Mikken-Bush sat rigid for several seconds before she said coldly, "Mr. Shayne, find the bronze at any cost."

#### IV

MIKE SHAYNE LEFT the mansion on long strides. He got into the Buick and drove away from the house. Down the quiet street he made a U-turn and eased into the deep shadows of a curbing, shut off the motor and doused the headlights. He glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. Almost ten-thirty. He slouched slightly in the seat, fastened his eyes on the street in front of the Mikken-Bush place. He had a clear view.

He'd wait until eleven, he decided, give instinct thirty minutes.

He snorted—*instinct!* If cop patrol boys happened along, asked him what the hell he was doing, they'd haul him into a precinct house with his answer and even Will Gentry, his longtime friend and chief of Miami police, would throw up his hands.

Cops believed in instinct too—but only in their own. In-

instinct somehow lost its luster with them when a gumshoe tossed it out as a reason for sitting in a dark heap on a dark street in an elegant section of Miami at ten-thirty at night.

Still, an eye needed crutches too. And instinct, hunch, intuition—call it sixth sense—was a vital crutch. Sometimes it kept a guy from getting killed...or it provided a catapult on a case.

A flat sports car bounced out of the Mikken-Bush grounds and sped off in the opposite direction just five minutes before the detective was ready to give up the vigil. He waited until the taillights had flashed around a corner, then put the Buick in gear. He picked up the sports car as it went up a ramp onto an expressway.

The sports car whizzed along in the middle lane. Shayne cruised fifty to one hundred yards back in the right lane. Finally the sports car dived off the expressway at an exit and the detective closed distance swiftly. The sports car turned right at the first intersection light, moved along another wide street.

They were in an area of medium to expensive condominiums. They rolled along for two miles and then the sports car slowed and turned off the street into a parking area

in front of a tall building that sparkled like tinsel in baby spotlights.

Shayne found an empty parking slot and watched Phelps Baxter walk across the lot and into the building. Baxter moved swiftly.

The detective strode to the glistening double door of the entry. The way Baxter was moving he wasn't going to slow down in a lobby. Shayne went through the doors and eyed an elevator indicator. A gilt dial hand stopped at seven.

He moved toward the elevator.

"Sir?"

The houseman was to the detective's left, behind an almost hidden wall desk. Tiny mailbox doors provided a background. He was neatly attired, had a totally bald head and a cocked right eyebrow.

Shayne said, "I thought my friend was going to wait for me in the lobby. He just came in. He said—"

"Mr. Andreeson?" He went up immediately, sir. He. . ."

The houseman cut off the words, the eyebrow dropped, and he pinked and shuffled around as he realized his error.

"Mr. Angreeson's unit number is?" fired Shayne.

"Well now, sir. . ."

"You can call him, tell him I'm on my way up."

"Oh. Unit seven hundred, sir!"

A tall, bronzed slat-like young woman, with long black hair that looked as if it had been pressed against her narrow head with an iron, finally opened the door to Shayne's thumb on a buzzer. She filled the opening. Her eyes were dark and steady, but there were nervous tics at the corners of her unpainted lips.

"Yes?" she said in a flat sultry voice.

"Mrs. Andreeson?"

"Yes—er..." The nervous tics danced. "Yes?"

"Phelps in?" Shayne said with a crooked grin.

"Ye—who?" The young woman squirmed. "I don't know anyone named Phelps!"

"You don't know the man who pays the rent?"

"I believe you have the wrong unit."

The woman tried to shut the door but Shayne had his toe in the opening. He kept his grin. "You're not very good at this sort of thing, are you, honey?"

He removed his toe. The door slammed shut. He heard a lock click. Downstairs, the houseman wasn't in sight when he crossed the lobby and went out of the building. Shayne sat in the Buick quietly for a few seconds.

Instinct had turned up what?

That Phelps Baxter had a young mistress.

So where did that fit into the theft of a little piece of bronze some people would pay a million dollars to own?

Hell, men with hot-dog money had mistresses.

Shayne pointed the Buick toward home. He envisioned whipping back out to the motel, getting a little heavy with Van Loot. The Dutchman might come up with a fresh lead about theft. But he put the thought down. A man who traveled with muscled pals didn't rent a motel unit for sleep. In all probability, Van Loot and his henchmen had disappeared thirty seconds after the detective's departure.

The blast came just as Shayne was turning the Buick from the street into the entry of the basement garage of his apartment building. It came from far away to his right as he was curving left. He jammed on the power brakes and skidded to a stop, inches from the building wall.

Yanking open the car door and rolling in one motion, he spilled from the Buick and tumbled down the incline of the entry. He had the .45 in his hand and was sure he was below street level when he stopped himself. He wriggled on elbows and knees back up to

where he could see the street.

Cars rolled past on the street, right and left, as if it were a Sunday afternoon for cruising.

Shayne kept his head low, the jut of his jaw just inches above concrete, and surveyed intently. There were frightened people in both directions on his side of the street. To his right, a man and woman, still were frozen in mid-stride. But most of the people were scurrying, getting out of the area.

The detective concentrated on the opposite side of the street. No cars leapt from the curbing and peeled away. Two men were bolting at full stride along the sidewalk. They held his attention for a moment.

Then, after an instant, everything seemed to settle. Cars continued to roll, people walked. It was an ordinary street in the late hour of an ordinary night in the city of Miami. The only thing askew was a Buick that had been braked crazily—probably by a drunk who had missed a driveway—against a building wall.

Shayne holstered the .45, went around the Buick and ran a hand over the indentations above the right rear wheel. Shotgun pellets had made those marks.

He got into it, backed from the wall and eased down into

the basement garage. George, the Negro attendant, had a huge grin and a wave for him as he parked in the stall and left the car.

"Nice, night, Mr. Shayne," said George.

"Yeah."

"Quiet?"

"Un-huh."

"Thought I heard a noise top-side."

"You didn't, George."

"Right on, man," said George, returning to his comic book.

## V

SHAYNE HAD SHOWERED, shaved, made and enjoyed scrambled eggs and toast and was sipping a second cup of black coffee when his phone jangled that hazy Tuesday morning. It was seven-fifteen.

"I've got an overnight sheet here," Will Gentry said without preliminaries, "on a reported blast that might have been a sewer blowing up, a cannon going off or a shotgun being fired. The report was made by an anonymous caller. Officers conducted an investigation, found nothing to substantiate the report. The sanitation people say their sewers were quiet last night, the military is too sophisticated for cannons these days, so that leaves shotgun.

"Now, shotguns are common. Anyone can buy and own a shotgun—but officers cannot find a shotgun within seventeen city blocks of reported blast, officers can't even find any residents within one hundred yards of reported blast who heard a damn thing, and—"

Gentry cut off the words and Shayne had a brief vision of the red-faced police chief hunched over his littered desk, rumpled eyelids heavy, black cigar stub jutting up from a corner of his mouth.

"Take it, Mike," said Gentry.

Shayne told him about the threatening note he had received in the Friday mail delivery.

"And?" pressed Gentry.

"I've been keeping a sharp eye, Will. No more."

"How come no more?"

"Busy with something else."

"Not related?"

"Doubt it."

"So?"

"Well, hell, there's a guy or two around, I suppose, who'd like to see my toes turned up. Maybe somebody I've leaned on, maybe somebody fresh out of one of your cells or prison. One thing is certain—he's a rookie with a shotgun, or he's scared. He doesn't want to get too close to me. He triggered from so far away last night the pellets didn't



even go through the side of the Buick."

"That must be comforting," Gentry said sarcastically.

"How about checking your release and parole sheets for me, Will? See if somebody I should know about is back in town?"

"Sure," Gentry growled. "Cops don't have much else to do these days." He paused, then asked, "This case you're on—are we interested?"

"You got a sheet on the theft of a little piece of bronze worth one mill?"

"Come on, Mike!"

"If I don't satisfy my client, she may come to you eventually. So far it's her loss, and she's employed me to find it loss. That's where it stands, Will. Check those sheets for me, huh? Got to roll."

"Mike. . ."

Shayne put the phone together, cutting off Gentry's drawnout growl. In his mind's eye, he saw the police chief sitting with a phone receiver extended as he stared at it, then pitching the receiver onto its hook. Gentry would fume, be miffed—and damned curious—but Gentry would not press.

For one thing, the police did not have a theft howl. More important, Gentry trusted him, and he was not too big a man in his role of police chief to roll along with Shayne. It was a relationship the detective and the chief had enjoyed and used for years.

Shayne thumbed the phone book and got exactly what he expected—no listing for Oswald Foly. He went to a City Directory and got the address he needed. Then he dressed and drove to the building that housed the *Daily News*. He knew it was too early in the day to find Tim Rourke, the veteran reporter, at his cluttered corner station, decided it was just as well. Rourke would be instantly curious about an interest in Oswald Foly.

A pert morgue girl handed Shayne the Foly envelope. It was not a large envelope. For a man of his stature in the Miami financial world, Foly had been equally successful in shunning publicity.

Foly was a money man, an investor, an art collector, probably 72 years of age, a widower for 49 of those years, rarely made appearances at community functions of any sort, traveled often and far, although the bulk of these journeys were not recorded, since he departed and returned incognito, had displayed absolutely no interest in politics or world affairs, and—had he lived in the western mountain country—probably would have been seen in a dirty cowboy hat and run-down boots and resided in an adobe hut.

In Miami, Oswald Foly lived in a pillared and heavily vined plantation house—its architectural style had gone out with the Civil War.

A smooth-skinned young man, wide in the shoulders and tapered in body, opened the heavy front door to Shayne's rap. He was neatly attired in a blue-grey leisure suit, flowered shirt and polished shoes. His eyes became mildly curious but his face remained smooth when the detective introduced himself and asked to see Foly.

"I'm sorry, sir," said the young man. "Mr. Foly is not receiving today."

"Maybe he'd be interested in a piece of bronze," said Shayne. "A Lysippus."

The young man frowned

briefly, then stepped back. "Please come in, sir."

The house had a dead-air smell and was dim. The walls were thick, the ceiling high, but the bare floor of the foyer glistened. The appointments had been new in the last century.

Shayne tossed his hat in small circles with his right hand while he waited for the young man to reappear. He finally stepped from a wide open entry and beckoned the detective. He gave the impression of being disinterested, but Shayne sensed it was facade. This young man was muscle.

He lifted a hand and stopped Shayne. "If you will leave your weapon with me, sir?" He extended a flat palm. "Mr. Foly abhors guns. They are not allowed in the house."

Shayne walked past him into a small high-ceilinged room that was probably considered to be a combination den and library. The windows were tall narrow openings between wall bookshelves. The room was packed with ancient furniture and a cadaverous looking man with a shock of white hair and dark bright eyes who sat straight and narrow in a high backed leather chair behind a huge desk that fronted a wall. The man's elbows were on the desk edge with fingers inter-

laced. He measured Shayne intently from the dark eyes.

Finally he said, "All right, William." The voice was soft. He did not stir.

Shayne heard a noise behind him and looked over his shoulder. The young man had pulled sliding doors from the walls. He brought the doors together and closed off a hard stare. William was evidently miffed.

"It is my home, Mr. Shayne," Oswald Foly said in the same flat voice.

"Would you take off your shoes at my door?" countered the detective.

The two men measured each other intently for a few seconds, then Foly sat back in the leather chair. "The Lysippus—I'm curious."

"It's been lifted." Shayne explained.

Foly was sitting forward again when the detective had finished. His fingers were interlocked, but this time they worked hard and Foly nodded to himself. "Interesting," he said.

"No more?" Shayne cocked a ragged eyebrow.

"Certainly, certainly." Foly continued to nod. Beneath his calm Shayne sensed excitement. "It means the Lysippus is for sale again."

"Your boy William doesn't have light fingers?"

Foly shot Mike Shayne a quick look, then returned to the finger squeezing exercise. "I'm suspect." His head bobbed. "Yes, I should be. It is logical speculation. But I do not possess the Lysippus, Mr. Shayne. I wish I did. However, the prospect that it soon will be on the market again is exhilarating."

"You'll bid?"

"Certainly!"

"No matter what the source of sale?"

Foly spread his hands and shrugged as he looked straight at the detective. "Any purchase I make will be legitimate, Mr. Shayne. How the seller acquired the property is not my concern."

"That, Foly, is called buying stolen merchandise."

"But I don't *know* the Lysippus has been stolen, Mr. Shayne. All I know is, Tina says it has been stolen. Should there be litigation, it will be between Tina and the seller."

"And meantime you'd have the Lysippus."

"Exactly."

"That's tippy-toeing, Foly."

"So be it!"

"From your reference to Miss Mikken-Bush, I assume you two have more than just a nodding acquaintance."

Foly's look again penetrated. He sat back, picked his lower lip. Then he said, "Arthur

Mikken-Bush and I were friends. We also were adversaries. Because of both relationships, I knew Arthur, know his daughters. I liked Arthur, his wife Florence. I do not care for their offspring.

"Tina is domineering, Myra is a fool and Laura should not exist. Laura is a late child—her conception was a mistake. I have maintained a distant relationship with the Mikken-Bush girls because of Arthur's collection. Now, however, the collection has been dispersed and the relationship will end."

"I'm picking that relationship, Foly. Tina Mikken-Bush is domineering?"

The millionaire's look narrowed. He seemed to be weighing answering against summoning William. "She aspires to be a queen," he said finally.

"The sister—Myra?"

"Floundering between blood ties and emotion. There is family, and there is a husband. She is standing at a crossroad with a leg on each road and no strength to bring either leg to the other."

"Laura?"

"You have met Laura?"

"No—seen her—standing on a staircase."

"Staring."

"Yes."

"Pills."

Shayne cocked an eyebrow.

"With the queen's blessing?"

"Tina is in the process of getting the house in order, Mr. Shayne. Riddance of Arthur's collection was first. Riddance of Phelps Baxter will be next. Laura's conversion to a nun out of cloth will be third."

"Baxter has a mistress."

Foly almost smiled. "Should I ever be in need of private investigative work, Mr. Shayne, I do believe I will consider you. You seem to get on top of things fast. Yes, Phelps Baxter always will have extra women near."

"Myra knows?"

He shrugged. "If she does, she doesn't care or she doesn't know what to do."

"Queen?"

"If I know, Tina knows. I suspect it is a large part of the reason he will go."

"What about Baxter?"

"Cash poor, paper wealthy. It's what he was left."

"And somebody named Socrates?"

Foly shrugged. "Perhaps Laura's salvation, perhaps not. He came out of nowhere, he's a con man or a shade from being one. He's lived within a blink of jailhouse doors, but never entered one, according to my information. Land deals, bonds, stocks, anywhere the fast dollar is turned—that's where Mr. Socrates has lived. I don't know

how he and Laura Mikken-Bush became acquainted, but William is of the opinion Mr. Socrates just might be the woman's salvation—if they were to depart together from the castle."

Shayne tugged an earlobe, then looked Oswald Foly straight in the eye. "Question: who among the Mikken-Bush clan might steal, and why?"

Foly looked mildly surprised. He remained motionless for several seconds. "That is an interesting speculation, Mr. Shayne," he said finally. "But I will have to dash cold water on your thinking, I'm afraid. It's a matter of motive. Purpose of theft would be to sell or to possess. Be assured, the Mikken-Bush women already have access to a vast supply of money. And they already possess."

"Phelps? His wife's resources are open to him—that is considerably more than the Lysippus would bring. And Baxter has no interest in art. On the other hand, there is this Mr. Socrates. . ."

Foly let the words hang for a moment before he said flatly, "The man is a gigolo, no more. Tina will be rid of him soon."

Shayne hunched forward. "Tell me something, Foly. If you wanted an imitation of this Lysippus, where would you get it?"

"If I wanted one, Mr. Shayne, there is a man in Rome. You must understand that making imitations of art objects is a legitimate business. There are experts in that field also. The man I speak of is the best I know with Lysippus' work. But given photographs—and with a knowledge of Lysippus' style—others can turn out crude fakes. However, they would be just that—very crude."

"I gathered from Van Loot's reaction this one is."

Foly shrugged again. "Van Loot would know."

"We got any of these imitator experts in Miami?"

"I don't know of anyone in the bronze field in all of the southeastern United States—and I would *know*, Mr. Shayne." Foly spoke significantly.

Shayne stood, paced, continued to work his ear. Then he looked Foly straight in the eye. "Van Loot has the idea I might have the real bronze for sale."

Foly lifted an eyebrow. "Do you?"

"How much?"

"One million—cash."

"Two."

"Which must mean Van Look offered one-point-five. Hmm." The old man contemplated, then said, "All right, Mr. Shayne, done."

The detective was at the sliding doors. He opened them,

looked back over his shoulder. "A man could live decently for a long time on two mill, tax-free."

"Yes," agreed Foly softly, coming out from behind the desk. He walked ramrod straight.

William was at the front door as Mike Shayne approached. He opened it wide for the detective, then followed Shayne outside. He whipped both arms around the redhead and thrust a hand inside Shayne's coat.

Shayne stomped on William's toes and rammed an elbow into the man's midsection. William grunted and reeled back. He slammed against a wall of the mansion, then slumped.

Foly filled the open doorway. Shayne looked at him. "Some day Willie's going to get hurt."

Foly said, "Every man has his frustrations, Mr. Shayne."

"I don't have the bronze."

Foly nodded. "I know."

The detective was rolling away from the plantation house in the Buick when he heard the radio newscast. Laura Mikken-Bush had been found dead in bed.

## VI

"SUICIDE," BREATHED Tina Mikken-Bush, "I can't believe it!"

She was ashen, her lips

pinched. Across the big front room, Phelps Baxter sat slumped in a deep chair, his eyes closed, his fingertips steepled. He, too, might have been dead. A trembling Myra Baxter paced a small area. The cops and a funeral director had been and gone.

Abruptly, Baxter said, "Those *insane pills!*"

He pitched forward, head down, hands dangling from the arms of the chair, head wagging. His wife continued to pace. Tina Mikken-Bush stared at the detective with eyes that were round and unblinking.

"I attempted to call you earlier. I couldn't...find you," she said.

"Pills?" Shayne pressed.

Baxter took it up without lifting his head. "Yellow pills, orange pills, blue pills, white pills—all on the table beside the bed. Insane, insane..."

Tina said, "We were at the breakfast table—everyone except Laura. We were waiting. The maid went upstairs, was unable to waken her. The bedroom door was locked. We became frightened. Phelps and Mr. Socrates finally splintered the door. We...well, we found her dead."

Shayne went upstairs. He had already examined the door and its jamb when Tina Mikken-Bush joined him.



"Knob lock," he said. "No bolts."

She nodded. "All of the doors in this house have knob locks."

"And open to one key?"

"No. There are separate keys."

"Then there was only one key to this room?"

"Yes. Laura possessed it. There is a master key for every door except the bedrooms," she replied.

"But duplicates could be made."

"Well...I suppose, if one had the original. But Mr. Shayne, I don't understand your questioning!"

"Where is Socrates?"

"He has..." She hesitated, then bit her lower lip. "Mr.

Socrates departed before the police arrived."

"With or without baggage?" Shayne asked.

"He left, disappeared. Just . . . suddenly. I mean, he was here and then he was—"

"Gone," the detective finished for her. "I noticed his absence downstairs. Could he have had a key to this door?"

"Well, I wouldn't think so, but now that you have mentioned the possibility of duplicates, I suppose. . ."

She let the words hang.

Shayne said. "Did you tell the cops about the missing Lysippus?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"It doesn't have anything to do with Laura!"

"It might if Socrates got a safe combination from her. He would need more than one, of course. There's the safe downstairs with two combinations—then there's the one in your bedroom where the key to the electrical circuit is kept."

"No one but myself knows the combination to my safe!"

"But Laura did know those to the one downstairs."

"Well yes. She might have remembered."

"Through the pill fog."

"Mr. Shayne, my sister was under a doctor's care. Her

medication was prescribed! She—"

"Tell me she wasn't a pill popper."

Tina Mikken-Bush chewed her lower lip, said nothing.

Shayne said, "It is possible she was murdered. She could have provided safe combinations, and pills could have been stuffed down her throat. She could have been in a semi comatose state and fed."

"Oh, my God!" Tina Mikken-Bush shuddered and returned downstairs. Shayne trailed her, watched Phelps and Myra Baster closely for reaction as Tina repeated his speculation.

Myra Baxter stood in her tracks, her mouth open, silent. Her husband started up from the chair, then sagged back. "Murdered?" he managed, his voice breaking. He sat staring for a moment before looking at Tina. "Ted?"

"Laura wouldn't kill herself intentionally," Tina said doggedly.

"You said Socrates cut fast?" Shayne asked.

Baxter looked at him. "Yes," he said after a few moments. "We broke open the door, Ted and I did. Then we saw Laura and. . . well, Ted ran."

"Got any ideas where he might head?" the detective asked.

Baxter shook his head. "None. But perhaps, Mr. Shayne..." He paused, then continued, "Look, it doesn't have to be murder. Perhaps in a moment of weakness sometime, or perhaps under the influence of a pill, Laura revealed the safe combinations to Ted. Perhaps he did steal the bronze, perhaps Laura last night realized, became depressed, became..."

He waved a hand suddenly. "Oh, I don't know!"

Shayne asked Tina Mikken-Bush, "The servants in the house now? I'd like to speak to your butler."

She frowned.

"I assume he's in charge of your domestics."

"Yes?"

"Is basically in charge of seeing that everyone functions properly and on time."

Her frown deepened. "Walter is exceptionally punctual."

"So get him in here."

Walter was a stiff quiet man who seemed in total control of his emotions and movements. He listened to Shayne's question, then nodded. "Yes, sir, we had a short power malfunction sometime last Thursday evening or Friday morning. The power was off for thirteen minutes to be exact, during the household sleep period.

"I noticed upon rising Friday

morning. I checked the non-electric alarm clock in my quarters against the electric clocks in the house in case there has been an unheard storm in the night. I immediately summoned an electrician, who assured me the household electrical system was in perfect order. He speculated the power company had experienced some kind of malfunction in this general area of the city during the night."

"Where's the master switch-box, Walter?"

"In the utility room, sir. Off the kitchen."

"Just a matter of seconds from the library?"

Walter frowned slightly. "Yes, sir. I would estimate that one could cover the distance in less than sixty seconds."

"Thank you, Walter."

When he was gone, Shayne surveyed the others in the room. No one said anything for several seconds, then Baxter spoke. "Ted came downstairs during the night, pulled the master switch, opened the safe and removed the Lysippus. Then, last night, Laura learned of the theft, realized she had provided the combination..."

He waved his arms and suddenly began to pace. "I can't believe it, I can't believe..."

"Mr. Shayne!"

It was Tina Mikken-Bush.

She was angry. And cold. "Find Mr. Socrates," she said.

## VII

THE MIAMI POLICE CHIEF slapped a flat palm against the top of his desk. The sound cracked like a rifle shot. An unlighted black cigar butt in the corner of his bulldog face jutted as he stared hard at Mike Shayne.

"I know," Will Gentry grumbled. "Somehow, Mike, when you walked through that door, I knew—"

The cigar butt bobbed as he cut off the words. He added flatly, "My people say suicide, Mike. The woman was a pill popper. Laura Mikken-Bush was on a downer, went behind a locked door and killed herself. She didn't need reason. But if she had to have one, she had that too. The M.E. says she was pregnant, probably about three months.

"But now you come in here and toss homicide at me. And it can't be a simple homicide—gun, knife, wire, club, something the D.A.'s people can handle in the courtroom. No—hell no—you gotta make it complicated. Someone stuffed too many pills down her throat! Motive! Mike, give me a motive—say, something like the theft of a hunk of bronze worth a million!"

Shayne lighted a cigaret, inhaled deeply. Gentry's speculation didn't surprise him. Gentry was a smart cop. He'd remember an early morning telephone conversation. The red-head put it together for the chief.

Gentry's breathing eased as he listened. He slouched in the chair behind his desk, chewed his cigar butt. When Shayne finished, he called for a package on Theodore Socrates. It was a thin package. The police didn't have much on Socrates. He was a perimeter man—complaints, but no follow-throughs, no charges.

The only thing new about Socrates to Shayne was that apparently he was a man of extremes. He lived and functioned in motels or moated castles, nowhere in between. The latest complaint filed against Socrates was in the previous year.

"You could be wrong about murder, Mike," Gentry offered.

"Un-unh," grveled the red-head.

"And this dude Socrates. He's got a history of being a man who does his catwalking on the edges. He isn't your champion of law and order, but he doesn't get his tootsies stuck in the mud either. He's always been able to pull them out. He isn't a man of violence. It just *could* be, Mike, he saw his lady love

dead in bed, it scared hell out of him—or he's flying in shock."

"With or without the stolen statuette, Will?"

"Maybe the death and the theft are unrelated."

Shayne stood, paced, glanced out a window. The morning haze had lifted, the early afternoon was bright. He lighted a fresh cigaret. The theft didn't have to be an inside job. A good B&E man, someone who knew or had been told about the electrical circuit alarm, didn't have to be a brain to search out a master switch.

And, if the B&E was working for someone who did not want the theft discovered for a few days—say, another art collector—he easily could have brought along a fake, exchanged it for the real Lysippus. Laura Mikken-Bush's death, as Gentry said, "could be unrelated. She could have been despondent, ditched. Pregnancy might have triggered her..."

Shayne stopped pacing, looked at Gentry, his eyes narrowed. "I'm ready to shake some bushes, Will."

The chief cocked an eyebrow. "Like...?"

"Give Tim Rourke the story about the theft. The *Daily News* already has the suicide. With it being a Mikken-Bush, it's hot stuff. But add a million dollar theft? They'll go bananas."



"And that gets?"

"Somebody, somewhere made a fake. Foly says it's basically a legitimate business. So maybe a Mr. Legit reads or hears the story, gets on the phone, offers the name—or at least the description—of someone who commissioned."

"Could be." Gentry nodded. "But that's *your* baby, Mike. Remember, the cops don't know about a theft. Nobody's beefed to us."

Shayne used the phone on Gentry's desk, dialed the private Mikken-Bush number,

told the butler to put Tina Mikken-Bush on the line. He asked about a pregnancy. Tina balked and the detective snapped, "Do you want me or don't you?"

There was silence before she said, "All right, Mr. Shayne. Laura was pregnant by Ted Socrates."

"Where do I find her doctor?"

"Mr. Shayne, I can't see how Laura's condition can possibly fit into—"

"Cooperate or dump me, lady," the detective repeated.

She gave him a downtown address.

"Call the doc and clear me. I'm going to see him. Has Socrates returned?"

"No—he hasn't. I don't really think he will."

"He might," said Shayne. "If he does, tell him to put anchors on his feet. I want to talk to him."

"Yes. All right."

Shayne dialed the *Daily News*, gave Tim Rourke's extension number. Rourke snapped up the receiver midway in the first ring. "Got a hot one for you, Tim. Make it an hour, hour-and-a-half, in my office?"

"Make it five minutes in a steam bath fully clothed. That's what kind of news day it is, Mike."

"This could be hooked up to the Mikken-Bush suicide. You

might want to pull the old man's morgue file background yourself."

"Beautiful!" breathed the reporter.

Shayne was at Gentry's office door when the chief graveled, "Hey, you want to hear about a shotgun man?"

The detective whirled.

"Nothing cold," said Gentry with a wave of the black cigar butt. "But we've had a drift from a couple of street corner informers. Cash Drake."

Shayne was surprised. "The shark?"

Gentry nodded. "Drake is supposed to be surprised, too. This morning." He paused, then added significantly, "and angry."

"Come on, Will!"

Gentry sat back. "The way we hear it is Drake has got this kid bugging him. Some new kid, a rookie who wants to break in, get on Drake's payroll. Drake knew the kid's old man or something. The old man was okay, solid. But he's in his grave now and the kid wants to fill papa's shoes. Trouble is, Drake is leery of the kid, doesn't need anyone right now anyway, got all of his slots filled. The recession, I guess.

"Anyway, to get the kid off his back, Drake tells him he's gotta prove himself before he can get in. He's gotta go out

and get a head, so that Drake will know that if he has to lean on some dude, the kid can handle the job. Drake figures just the thought will turn the kid back to nickel-and-dime gas-station holdups. It doesn't. The kid presses. He wants names. Who does Cash Drake want blow away?

"So Drake gives him a couple of names—yours and mine. Drake figures—hell, the kid isn't gutsy enough to go after the city's police chief or a private eye who's known to be rough on the edges. He figures the kid will stomp off stuffed with bravado and big ideas, then will have second thoughts and just fade away in the fog. Drake thinks it's funny as hell...

"Except somebody took a shotgun pop at you last night, Mike. And the way we hear it, Cash Drake is boiling this morning—maybe even a little scared. The humor is gone. You get the kid, we get the kid, and he's gonna yak. That gets Drake visitors—which he doesn't want."

"He's got one," Shayne said.

Gentry shook his head. "Cool it, Mike. Drake can find the boy in half your time. Maybe already has. Meanwhile, I've got a couple of guys sniffing around town, too."

The police chief broke into a

rare, genuine chuckle. "Go on—go see your doctor before you pop a hemorrhoid. Let Cash Drake take care of his own doings. I don't think you need to worry about any more shotgun blasts."

Dr. Mason Cromwell got a \$200 office visit fee for assigning a crisp nurse the complicated task of strapping on a black arm band and pursing lips over a blood-pressure reading. Shayne found it that kind of a small quiet office, tucked securely into a high corner of a tall white building.

He was ushered into a plush private sanctuary. Dr. Cromwell stood at a window, staring out on the city. He was a small straight man with pampered snow-white hair. He glanced at the detective over his shoulder but did not offer a hand.

"This is irregular," he said. "I'm against discussion with you."

"On the other hand, doctor," countered the redhead, "you *do* like the rustling sound of Mikken-Bush dollars?"

"Your questions?" Cromwell said.

Laura Mikken-Bush had been three to four months pregnant and privately excited about her condition. She wanted the baby. She wanted to live. She was not suicide prone. Yes, she experienced periods of depression,

perhaps a bit more often than the average woman, but these periods were brought on by an emotional struggle, not her physical condition. Laura Mikken-Bush was dominated. She wanted to break out. How to make that break was her frustration.

"Let me get this straight, doc," said the redhead. "You're saying Laura was thinking about leaving the home nest?"

"I'm saying she cherished the thought, Mr. Shayne," Dr. Cromwell said. "You asked for an opinion, I gave you mine."

"How come she wouldn't just pack and go?"

Cromwell lifted his hands. His face remained blank.

Shayne looked the doctor straight in the eye. "The pills?"

Cromwell's face muscles worked. "Prescribed by another physician. The Mikken-Bush women have been coming to me for less than a year."

"And where do I find this other doctor?"

"He is dead, Mr. Shayne."

The redhead frowned.

"Mr. Shayne..." Dr. Cromwell left the window, went behind a polished desk. "Tempering an addict of any kind can be a long process, but I was making progress with Laura Mikken-Bush. Conception helped. It turned her thinking. It is my opinion that, given

another six weeks, I would have had her totally free of her habit."

"But the fact is, doc"—Shayne spoke bluntly—"she still was a popper—and she could have swallowed too damn many pills sometime last night."

"Yes," he admitted.

"Or someone could have stuffed a few too many down her throat."

Cromwell looked astonished.

"It could happen?" pressed the detective.

"Well, I suppose..."

Cromwell caught his lower lip with his teeth. Shayne left him chewing the lip and the thought. He pointed the Buick toward Flagler Street, where he found a *Daily News* car braked at the curbing in front of his office building and, upstairs, a perky Lucy Hamilton busy typing.

Lucy swung in her chair to face him. He was instantly alert. Lucy's face didn't change, but her eyes were alive with a mixture of curiosity and excitement.

"Michael," she said efficiently, "Tim Rourke is in your private office and each of these gentlemen is waiting to see you."

The man to Shayne's left was of medium stature, had a naturally dark complexion and a

full head of black hair. He looked mid-thirtyish and wore a deep green suit with a vest. His shoes had been polished recently. The incongruity was in the suit's wrinkles and the fresh scratch marks on the shoes. He didn't look like a man who would tolerate either—unless he had something heavy on his mind.

He leaped to his feet. "Mr. Shayne," he blurted before Lucy could continue, "I am Ted Socrates!"

"And I'm Roy James, man," interrupted the sinister voice to Shayne's right.

Roy James was thin and as tall as the detective. Bushy hair and a scraggly beard gave him an appearance of being much older than his actual years. He wore open-toed beach shoes, faded jeans and an imitation leather motorcycle jacket studded with dull buttons. The jacket was buttoned at his waist and gaped across the narrow chest revealing a soiled pullover shirt. His eyes were small, dark and bright.

Roy James stuck a hand inside the jacket waistband and brought out a Saturday Night Special. He pointed the gun at Shayne's middle.

mail, man?" Roy James smirked.

Lucy Hamilton gasped and somewhere behind the detective Ted Socrates groaned, "Oh, my God!"

Shayne fainted to his left and leaped to his right. The sound of the gunshot was surprisingly loud.

There was a tiny yelp from Lucy and a howl from Socrates. Both sounds were followed by Tim Rourke's startled shout from the inner office. Shayne saw Lucy slide out of sight down below the surface of her desk and Socrates go into a spin. Socrates went to the floor as Rourke loomed suddenly in the open doorway across the room.

Shayne caught it all as he continued to move. Roy James had gone for the feint, but he was coming around, bringing the small gun in an arc toward the detective. The toe of Shayne's shoe smashed against the gunman's wrist as a second shot was triggered. Crashing sound again filled the redhead's ears and there was a tingling sensation across the outside of his left shoulder.

But he was in on James now. He swung his body powerfully, crashing his hips against James' groin area as he reached up with both hands and captured the extended arm.

### VIII

"YOU GET MY MESSAGE in the

He twisted the wrist savagely, was conscious of the gun flipping free, then yanked the arm down so the straightened elbow came down on his shoulder.

Shayne continued the downward movement. He heard the elbow snap and then the only sound was of Roy James screaming in pain and terror as the redhead flipped the youth across his body.

James landed flat on his back in the open doorway, moaning and writhing. He had lost his beach shoes somewhere. His bare heels worked against the hard surface of the floor as if he were attempting to dig into sand. He twisted onto his side and caught the wrist of his fractured arm with his good hand, groaning.

Shayne stepped over James and captured his flailing bare ankles. The hallway was beginning to fill with babbling people from other offices, but the babbling drifted off and the people parted as Shayne pulled the groaning man down the hallway and into the self-service elevator.

"Tell Cash Drake I don't appreciate his humor," he growled. Then he punched the down button and returned to his office.

Lucy was out from behind the desk and hovering over the fal-

len Socrates. He lay flat on his back and his eyelids were closed, but he was breathing deeply. Lucy held a handkerchief against his cheek.

Shayne took the handkerchief. There was a slight pink mark along Socrates' jawline. It looked like a razor burn. Shayne growled, "Okay—on your feet, Socrates. The skin isn't even broken."

"*Michael!*" Lucy breathed. "Look at your *shoulder!*"

There was a tear in his coat across the top of his biceps. The edges of the tear had turned red. He shrugged out of the jacket, yanked off his shirt. The skin of his arm was broken, but the slight wound was already beginning to cake.

He reached down and hooked a hand in the armpit of a sitting Ted Socrates, brought Socrates upright. Socrates gave him a frightened glance and took a step toward the door. Shayne clamped his arm tight.

"Oh, *no*," he said. "You came here to talk—we talk," He propelled Socrates toward the private office.

The smaller man stumbled toward Tim Rourke, who still filled the entry. Rourke faded back as Shayne said over his shoulder, "Call Will Gentry, Angel. Fill him in. The cops are going to be up here eventually, and I don't need them. They'll

only slow things. Tell Gentry Socrates is here."

Mike Shayne plopped Socrates into the chair in front of his scarred desk. Rourke had already taken up one of his favorite positions, leaning his long narrow body against a wall. He was braced by the edge of a shoulder and he looked loose and at ease, but Shayne knew that inside the bony structure, juices were flowing and Rourke waiting with eager anticipation.

Rourke said, "Did I say something earlier about this being a dull news day?"

Shayne dug a laundry-packaged shirt out of a filing cabinet drawer, tossed away the cardboard, snapped out the shirt and slid into it. Buttoning it, he said, "The kid out there is private, Tim. What you're interested in is a case I'm working on and perhaps Socrates here."

He made brief introductions as he stuffed the shirt into his trousers. Lucy Hamilton entered the office. She carried the Saturday Night Special and dangled beach shoes from one hand, held a medicated patch in the other.

She gave Shayne a brief glance, said nothing, put the shoes and the gun on his desk, then came around it and opened his shirt, taped the

patch across the wound and re-buttoned the shirt.

"Will is on his way," she said as she left the office.

Rourke chuckled. "Mother hen," he said as Shayne got into another drawer of the filing cabinet, took out a bottle of Martell and three glasses.

He poured cognac into the glasses and pushed one toward Socrates. "Tonic for the nerves. Enjoy it while I fill in our curious friend here. Incidentally, Will Gentry is this town's chief of police. He'll be joining us soon."

Socrates stood as if he were resting on coiled springs.

"Cool it," growled Shayne, settling lower in the chair behind his desk. "You came here this afternoon and you could have been on your way to Zanzibar. You had that much of a start. It tells me something. Chief Gentry appreciates cooperation, too."

Socrates shuffled, finally returned to the chair. He gulped the cognac. Shayne poured again and told Rourke about the missing Lysippus.

Rourke took notes with a variety of expressions, but he did not ask questions until the detective had finished. Then he looked at Socrates. "You cop it?" he asked.

Socrates jerked, shot a look at Shayne. "Me?"

Shayne drank cognac. "Seems

a simple enough question, Ted. The statuette is gone, Laura is dead, and this morning—"

"Oh, God!"

Socrates had shot to his feet again. Shayne snapped, "You fly *now*, pal, and you *really* are going to be suspect!"

Socrates looked ready to dive out the window. But he finally managed to regather himself. He sat, reached for an empty glass. His hand was shaking.

Shayne poured, then cocked an eyebrow against the sound of commotion in the outer office. Suddenly two uniformed policemen were inside the office. They looked around swiftly. "Okay, which one of you is Mike Shayne?" one of them asked.

"Me."

Four eyes snapped to the redhead. He sood, looked over their heads and saw Will Gentry roll into the outer office. The cigar butt in the corner of Gentry's mouth was tilted skyward. Gentry moved past Lucy Hamilton to the inner room. He glanced at the patrolmen, removed the cigar butt.

"I'll take it from here, boys," he said. He looked at Rourke. "Tim?"

"Just leaving, Chief," said the newspaperman, pushing from the wall.

"Appreciated," Gentry said.

But Rourke stopped at

Shayne's desk. "This is all interesting as hell, Mike—except I have to have confirmation of the theft. It hasn't been officially reported. No editor will accept—"

Shayne swept up the phone, got Tina Mikken-Bush on the line. She balked. "I don't want the publicity!"

"The fake," snapped the readhead. "Someone made it. He or she will remember. We need all the help we can get, Miss Mikken-Bush."

"No! This is a private affair! It is why I employed a *private* detective."

The phone went dead in Mike Shayne's ear. He looked at it, then tossed the receiver onto its cradle. He sat slouched for several seconds before looking up. "No dice from her end, Tim," he growled. "Damn!"

"Socrates?" Gentry snapped it out.

The man in the chair jerked hard.

"You know about the statuette?"

"Y-yes."

"And you've been living in the house out there?"

"Well—yes."

"There's been a theft?"

"Apparently—yes."

"Take it, Rourke," Gentry said. "There apparently has been the theft of a valuable statuette. Worth an estimated

million. The police department is investigating. You can quote me."

Rourke departed. He was moving fast and grinning.

Shayne grunted. "Thanks, Will."

Gentry put a hip on a corner of Shayne's desk, looked down on Socrates. "Okay, let's hear your story. Go 'way back to how you met Laura Mikken-Bush, your relationship with her, why you disappeared when you saw her dead this morning."

## IX

TED SOCRATES WAS a confused man, frightened, and a little awed by all that had happened. But his story seemed plausible. Shayne listened intently, slouched low, his grey eyes hanging on Socrates, his bushy eyebrows down.

By his appearance in the office, Socrates already had shot a big hole in one of the detective's early theories—that the gigolo could have lifted the statuette and been on the fly. He wasn't—he was sitting over there in a chair, nervous as a starving cat in a fish market, professing true love for Laura Mikken-Bush—and no interest in her money or the invaluable Lysippus.

Or was he a smart cat? Was he a thief, a murderer, doubling

back to his crimes to temper suspicion?

"So," said Gentry when Socrates finally quit talking, "in a nutshell, you're saying you and the Mikken-Bush woman were going to marry, move out of the house, go on your own someplace, and neither of you gave a razz about a statuette."

"All I wanted to do was go away with her, to an island, anywhere, I didn't care where! All I wanted was to get her off those crazy damn pills and away from her sisters! But I couldn't force her! She had to make both moves voluntarily or it wouldn't work for us!"

"And," Gentry continued as if Socrates had not interrupted, "when you found her dead in her bed this morning, you got all shook up and cut a trail. You had to get away from the house, go off to a dark cave somewhere and do some heavy thinking. You didn't start out on the lam, then have a second thought, come over here to Shayne's place, put in an appearance to take some heat off? You wouldn't be that kind of a smart cookie, would you?"

Socrates shuddered all over and shook his head. "I don't think I... understand," he said in a voice that broke.

Shayne put in gruffly, "He means, Socrates, maybe you've been working the dame all

these weeks. Maybe your real interest in her was her bankroll. Maybe Laura didn't see your intent, but the sisters did. Maybe you had to get Laura the hell out of that house before the sisters cut your string to her loot.

"And maybe you conned Laura into thinking the statuette belonged to her, that the two of you should take it along when you cut. After all, the sisters could hire a legal beagle to cut her off from the Mikken-Bush millions after she was gone. The Lysippus could be insurance for you. Peddle it under a table somewhere and pick up a mill. A guy could live for a while on a million bucks."

"No!" Socrates cried, shaking his head doggedly.

Shayne plunged on, "You con Laura into giving you the safe combinations, you have a fake Lysippus made, then you go downstairs in the middle of the night, pull the master switch, make the exchange. But at this point Laura tosses you a curve. She decides she can't tear herself away from the home nest. Or she can't have a role in theft. Or maybe it's a combination of the two.

"Whatever her reason, it's decision time for you. You can return the real Lysippus to the safe and work on Laura some more, or you can disappear

with the Lysippus and make a sale later.

"But disaster strikes before you make that decision. The fake is discovered—and you're still inside the household. There is no time now to put distance between yourself and Miami. You must go underground, really underground. Laura must be silenced immediately. Laura is not a stable person. Hard questioning will unnerve her. She'll babble. And who'll get ten to twenty out of the babbling? It won't be Laura Mikken-Bush!

"So you get her to open her bedroom door in the middle of the night, you push pills down her throat and then you slip out, locking the door behind you. How am I doing?"

Socrates had sagged. He seemed unable to move. He looked totally defeated. "Mr. Shayne," he finally managed. "Chief..." He didn't look up—his voice was barely audible. "I didn't kill Laura. It would be emotionally impossible for me to commit the act."

Shayne shot Gentry a hard look. They stared at each other in silence. Shayne knew their thinking was on the same wave length. Truth had a ring.

"But if you think I did..." Socrates said, his voice quivering.

Shayne yanked his ear. Gen-

try's cigar stub bobbed slightly.

Socrates finally looked up. His stare hung on the police chief as if Shayne no longer existed. "I can't give you the statuette," he said, his tone firming. "I don't have it."

Gentry left the corner of Shayne's desk. He took the dead cigar butt from his mouth, looked at it. Suddenly he turned and stared hard at the redhead. He opened his mouth, but no words came out. He jammed the cigar butt into a corner of his lips and stomped out of the office, sweeping up the beach shoes and the Saturday Night Special en route.

Socrates looked at Shayne. It was the look of a man who has had a gun jammed in his belly, heard a heavy click, but felt no pain, seen no blood spurting from his gut. Hope came alive. With it, Socrates was on his feet.

"Hold it," Shayne said.

Socrates stood rooted.

"You understand why he didn't haul you off to the can?"

"No."

"He doesn't have a legal leg to stand on. You might be able to sue hell out of the city. But more important. . ."

Socrates finally said through the silence. "Yes?"

"He's a fair man. No railroad-ing. But he also is a goddamn bulldog. And he's got his teeth

in the seat of your pants. So if you happen to be one of the few dudes who can lie with a straight face, you might want to reconsider. There's something else, too. . ."

Shayne again let the words hand and Socrates snapped at them. "Something else?"

"Me! I'm being paid a helluva lot of money to find the Lysippus."

"But I don't have it, Mr. Shayne!"

"And you didn't kill Laura Mikken-Bush?"

"No!"

"She *was* murdered? She didn't commit suicide? I want your opinion just one more time."

"She wouldn't take her own life!"

"I've also been paid a helluva lot of money to find a killer."

Socrates went silent.

"If it turns out to be you, pal, you won't find a hole deep enough. Okay, see you around. Incidentally, where do I find you if I want you?"

"I'm not sure."

"Find a hook. Hang your hat on it. Watch TV. But keep in touch."

Shayne rose from his chair suddenly. "You're lucky, Socrates. Think how much that kind of advice could cost you if you were a client instead of a suspect."

The detective waited until Socrates was in the outer office, then swept up the phone and punched Lucy Hamilton's light. She came on the line immediately.

"Grab some empty envelopes, anything, Angel, to make it look like you're making a mail run. Ride down in the elevator and go outside with Socrates. I'm letting him go free so I can follow him. I'll be coming up out of the garage in the car. I want to know in which direction he goes."

Lucy was at the street entry of the garage when Shayne eased the Buick up out of the building. She stabbed a finger down the street. The detective turned after Ted Socrates, then hung back.

Socrates boarded a city bus at the second intersection. Shayne turned after the bus. A pale blue sedan appeared behind the detective, hung in the rear view mirror.

Socrates rode the bus ten blocks, got off and entered a second class hotel. Shayne braked beyond the hotel entry, walked back to the door and looked inside. Socrates was at the registration desk. Shayne watched him take a key from the clerk and turn to a waiting elevator.

The detective walked on down the street to the parked

blue sedan. The window on the sidewalk side was down. Shayne leaned forearms on the window frame and stared inside at the young driver. The man inside held up a shield.

Will Gentry didn't trust Socrates either. He wanted to know if the little man was going to land or fly.

## X

RESTLESSNESS WAS ALIVE inside Shayne. He felt as if he was running in deep water. He wanted to get his teeth into something solid but, so far, all he seemed to have was a case laced heavily with maybes.

Maybe he had a murder, maybe he had a suicide. Maybe he had a theft from inside a fancy mansion, maybe from the outside. Maybe he had a theft and a death related, maybe not.

Prime suspects didn't exactly loom either. Outside the mansion, Foly and his boy, William, carried the brightest colors. Primarily because of geography, Foly resided in the city. But that didn't mean other collectors, like the Hollanders—or people a redheaded private detective never had heard of—were out of the picture.

And, of course, from inside the mansion, there was Ted Socrates. The man had a history of shady operations, he

was not family, he had had easy access to the wall safe. A lover could glean inside information. But the Lysippus was gone, a woman was dead and Socrates was not running.

Neither were the two remaining Mikken-Bush women, Phelps Baxter nor the domestics.

But a mistress had disappeared. Shayne's rugged contours wrinkled in a scowl as the condominium desk man said, "Mrs. Andreesen moved out this morning. You missed her by no more than a few hours."

"No forwarding address, I assume!" Shayne said sourly.

"We are to be notified, sir, as soon as she has settled in a new location."

"You're not putting any heavy money on that, are you, pal? Have you got a phone handy?"

"There's a pay phone in the entry, sir."

Phelps Baxter was in the Mikken-Bush home. He sounded flustered and his tone was guarded when he said, "Yes, Mr. Shayne, I am aware Miss Lane has. . ."

He paused, then said coldly, "Really, Mr. Shayne, my *private* life is unrelated to your investigation."

Shayne, "unless your Miss Lane is skipping with a bronze



statuette tucked in her suitcase. Has she been leaning on you—say, a little blackmail maybe?"

"Absurd!"

"Tell me you're not ripe," the redhead needed.

Phelps Baxter didn't tell the redhead anything. He hung up. Shayne stood with the receiver in his hand for a few seconds. His scowl deepened. Then he hooked the receiver and went outside into late afternoon sunshine.

Put the death of Laura Mikken-Bush aside. Concentrate on theft. Baxter had a known weakness—women. So, was the Lang girl just another filly in a stable or was she a tool, someone brought in to sate

Baxter's appetite? Had she lured, seduced and demanded in an engineered scheme? Someone who wanted the Lysippus—without paying the price—could have dangled the girl.

On the other hand, the theft and turning over of such a valuable statuette was a tremendously high price to pay for silence about an indiscretion. Especially when a man had a second choice. Although not a palatable thought, Baxter could go to his wife, tell her about the girl, the position he was in, ask for a fresh start. All he would be risking then would be scorn from a spouse—plus the wrath of a domineering sister-in-law. Either or both would be better than risking a walk down a one-way street to a jailhouse.

Unless...

Shayne slapped the steering wheel of the Buick as he drove away from the condominium. *Motive!* If Baxter had a stronger motive—like desire for a new life in a new corner of the world with a new woman. He and a fluff could disappear and peddle the Lysippus later.

But could Baxter kill? Did he have the guts patiently to push pills down the throat of a semi-comatose woman?

More importantly, *why* kill? What made murder necessary?

Mike Shayne drove to his

apartment building. He'd phone Lucy, tell her to button up for the day. He hadn't eaten lunch. He could go out later, grab a burger. He wasn't exactly knocking down a row of stacked dominoes, but he was on a case and he was bumbling along. No time for eating. Time for sipping, perhaps. Cognac. One—or two. Sip and think, let the thoughts rove free. Perhaps a pearl would surface...

He rode alone in the self-service elevator from the basement garage to his floor. The elevator doors whispered open. He stepped out, then stopped. A flabby swarthy man in a purple leisure suit and a bright pink shirt sat with his knees up and his back braced against the wall down the corridor. The man stared at the detective, his expression unchanging.

"Shayne," the fat man said.

The detective didn't move. "Cash."

"I gotta talk to yuh. The kid—a joke. Boomerang—wham!"

"Un-huh."

"No hard feelings?"

"Yeah, hard feelings, Cash."

The swarthy man winced, stood up with an effort. "Okay, so break my arm, too. That'll make us even?"

"Nope."

"So whaddayuh want?"

"Don't bawl at me, Cash."

"Shayne. . ." It was a plea.

"The kid shot up my office."

"Yeah, yeah, I hear. Okay, I pay." He pulled a roll of bills from a trouser pocket, began to peel. "These are C notes, man. You say when."

"You know the orphanage on Oxford, Cash?"

Cash stopped peeling, lifted an eyebrow. "Naw."

"Only one I know of on all of Oxford. You do your peeling out there, okay? I'll check your generosity in a day or two. Now, get the hell out of my way!"

When Shayne entered his apartment, his phone was ringing. He snapped it up. Tim Rourke was on the line. "Mike, maybe something, maybe not. I just hauled in from police headquarters. Didn't talk to Will, he's cut for the day, but a guy down there was telling me they've had a call from some deputy sheriff out in New Mexico—Santa Fe. Fella's name is Jiminez, Richard Jiminez. Anyway, he's interested. . ."

Rourke hesitated, then said, "Let me back up, Mike. The wire services, the AP and the UPI, gobbled up the Mikken-Bush story, coupling the suicide and the missing Lysippus. The story is moving all over the country, newspapers, radio, TV. Okay, this Jiminez heard it on radio couple of hours ago and

he's interested. Seems he had a murder out there in Santa Fe three weeks ago, a young guy, a sculpter of sorts, a guy who specialized in imitating masterpieces.

"The guy was clubbed to death and this Jiminez hasn't gotten out of the batter's box yet in his search for the killer. No suspects, no motive, nothing. Then, this afternoon, Jiminez hears a newscast about the missing Lysippus. It tweaks his interest, so he calls the cops here. Jiminez is reaching for any straw that might blow through New Mexico."

"Interesting," mused Shayne. "A long shot, but interesting. Okay, thanks, Tim. I think I'll give Jiminez a buzz."

The redhead had difficulty finding Richard Jiminez, deputy sheriff, in Santa Fe. A Jiminez in Santa Fe was like a Gold in Miami. And when the right Jiminez did get on the line, he listened to Shayne, then said from his home phone, "Are you with the police there in Miami, Mr. Shayne?"

"Private."

"Which makes you a pinto bean to me, fella."

The click in Shayne's ear angered him. He pitched phone into its cradle and paced the carpet. If the building quivered under his steps, he didn't notice. Thoughts rolled through

his mind like the endless waves of a stormy sea. He picked up the phone again. Two hours later, he was slumped in the seat of a jetliner as it winged toward Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Wednesday dawned gray and cool in Santa Fe. The casual—almost lazy—functioning of the town and its inhabitants kept the redhead pacing and chain-smoking inside the wooden-floored outer office of the Sheriff's Department headquarters as he waited for Deputy Richard Jiminez to show for the day's stint. Black coffee in a paper cup, frequently offered by an Indian girl secretary, was neither a coolant to the detective nor a breakthrough for the openly-curious girl.

She finally gave up with a smile and a philosophical, "The sun is up, Mr. Shayne. You can't see it this morning because of the clouds. On the other hand, neither do you have the power to part the clouds. That power remains with the mysterious winds over which you have no control either. So you might as well relax. Ah, here is Deputy Jiminez."

He was a neat, dark, smooth-skinned man of around thirty years. His grey-blue sheriff's uniform looked as if he had just stepped into it at the dry cleaner's next door. Dark eyes, dark revolver belt and

holster, dark boots, could have been dipped in polish just prior to his entry.

He listened to the Indian girl's introduction, remained stone-faced for a couple of seconds, then flashed a white-toothed smile and returned Shayne's clamping handshake with matching strength.

"Hey, all the way out here from Miami—and overnight! You're no pinto bean. Is that what you're telling me?" His grin widened. "Okay, come on in. Let's see if we've got a foot up on the same stirrup."

Shayne laid out his case—the missing statuette, the fake replacement. That imitation had to have been made somewhere, and imitating art masterpieces was a legitimate business with some people. Maybe the imitation Lysippus had been made in Santa Fe. Maybe the imitator had been killed to insure silence.

Deputy Jiminez nodded. Maybe. His three-week-old corpse was that of a young man named Robert Smith—bachelor from nobody knew where. It had been established that Smith had been in the city approximately nine years, was a loner, had a small shop with three-room living quarters at the rear, and imitations were his bag. Bronzes—that's all he did. Bronze imitations—no orig-

inals. He worked from originals or from photographs.

He had been killed by a two-by-four. His skull had been bashed to pudding texture by someone wielding the piece of wood. The weapon had been left beside the body. Apparently it had come from a stack of similar pieces of lumber Smith kept in his shop.

Jiminez had a corpse, a murder case and murder weapon. But he did not have motive for murder. Smith's shop and living quarters seemed undisturbed. Smith was not affluent. Smith was a loner, with no special friends or enemies. He had no wife, no mistress. No one seemed to care whether Smith was alive or dead.

So Jiminez, desperate for motive, had turned to Smith's work. No leads there—nothing. Then he heard the radio newscast about the Miami case. Two things about that case interested him—the fake statuette and the fact the fake had been bronze. Smith was an imitator, and Smith worked in bronze. Perhaps there was a connection. Geography, distance between the two points—Santa Fe and Miami—weighed heavily against a tie, but just perhaps...

"One of my suspects," said Shayne, "told me he'd go to Rome to get his copy made."



"Access to money does shorten distance." Jiminez nodded.

"And all of the people I'm tied to in this case hire others to keep their bank accounts straight," the detective said,

rising. He lighted a fresh cigaret, puffed deeply. "One other thing—are you satisfied all locals as killers are out? What about your winos, the drug boys, someone who might have wandered into Smith's place off the street just to look around."

"I'm satisfied," said Jiminez. "I went that route the first ten days after Smith's body was found. I cleaned out alleys in the shop area and we put up a little bounty for all of our informers to drool over. Nothing. Smith had some traffic, yeah—non-native traffic. But that doesn't mean much here, Shayne."

"We're an artsy town and the area where Smith's place is...well, in other towns I guess it might be called a Bohemian area, but here tourists, strangers, are like sagebrush rolling across our land. You want to take a run over to Smith's place? It's locked up now, but I've got a key."

Mike Shayne scratched his nose in thought. "Would I be likely to turn up something you haven't?"

Jiminez shrugged. "I don't know how private detectives operate. I've never been associated with one."

"We learn to listen and to size up. I've worked with the

top Miami cop for years. Could a woman be your killer?"

Jiminez frowned for a moment, then said, "Could be, if she got in a good first lick, one that knocked Smith unconscious. She could have finished him off on the floor."

Shayne went to the office door. "I may be in touch with you again."

"Thanks for the thought about a woman, Shayne. I hadn't considered a female suspect."

Shayne couldn't resist. "It's just one of the tricks of the trade, Deputy," he said, "if you're a private eye. You learn to consider *everybody* in a crime."

"Ouch!" Jiminez grinned.

On the return flight to Miami, Shayne reconsidered all of his suspects. With touchdown at International Airport, he was forced to concede the journey to Santa Fe probably had been a waste. It was concession that was reinforced when he arrived at his apartment building.

Tina Mikken-Bush got out of a car rental sedan and joined the detective as he braked the Buick in the basement stall. She looked as if she had been teetering precariously on the rim of a precipice for hours.

"Where have you *been*?" she bleated, her voice breaking.

"I've been looking for you all day! A man is demanding a million-dollar ransom for my Lysippus!"

## XI

SHE HAD RECEIVED the ransom demand by telephone around nine o'clock that morning. The caller wanted the million dollars placed in a briefcase and the briefcase taken by Tina Mikken-Bush in a rental car to Mike Shayne's office on Flagler Street at 10 o'clock the next morning. She was to park the car in front of the building, leave the key in the ignition switch, put the briefcase on the front seat and walk away.

"And receive the statuette when?" Shayne asked.

She chewed her lower lip. "I—don't know. All I know is..." Her voice firmed, "He said I would be notified where I could find the Lysippus after he had the money. He said that if I did not pay or if I went to the police, the Lysippus would go to the bottom of the Atlantic."

"It's occurred to you, I suppose," Shayne said, "That he can collect and keep the Lysippus, lay on you again."

"But I can't let the Lysippus be destroyed!"

"Which is exactly what he's riding, lady. So how come you're here now?"

"Wh-at? Well—can't you do *something*?"

He shot a look over her. "I see you're already driving a rental car."

"And I managed to put the money together today." She nodded.

"It's in the car?"

"Yes."

"Your sister—Baxter. Are they in on this?"

"Myra is unnerved. She doesn't know what to think. But then Myra never knows what to think about anything. She's only made one decision in her life, and it was a bad one. She married Phelps. He's furious, of course. He doesn't want me to pay. Phelps doesn't like to see Mikken-Bush money spent—unless he benefits.

"But neither of them are involved, Mr. Shayne. What either might think does not matter. I make the decisions in our house. And I've decided to pay. What else can I do? I don't want the Lysippus destroyed or lost forever. It's now merely a question of how you make sure the Lysippus is returned to me."

"The cops aren't bad at turning up stolen articles."

"The police are not to be brought into this." She shook her head vigorously. "I've been warned. *But I was not warned about anyone else.* So that

leaves you, Mr. Shayne. I am to leave the money on the seat and the keys in the ignition switch of the car. I assume that means the man intends to get into the car and drive away. You can follow him, you can—"

"Lady," Shayne interrupted, no longer able to control the sarcasm, "think about where you were told to leave the car—in front of my office building! Doesn't that tell you something?"

She frowned, suddenly seemed at a loss for words.

"It tells *me*," Shayne said with a deep scowl, "your caller is damned well aware of our relationship, and he picked my building for a reason."

She stared at the detective.

"There's only one way to play this hand. We call. You leave the car here overnight, pick it up in the morning, drive it to my building, park it and fade. And be damn sure you do just that. Get the hell out of the area. Our man probably will already be in the vicinity, probably will be watching you park. You do anything cute, and he'll be suspicious. So scram. I'll be around, but don't look for me. Savvy?"

"Yes," she nodded. "But—"

Shayne waved her down. "Forget it. Incidentally, I assume you didn't recognize the voice on the phone."

"No." She shook her head. "There was—something vaguely familiar about it, but—well, there was something strange about it, too. It just didn't sound right. I mean—"

"Sound muffled?"

"Perhaps that was it."

The detective ran a thumb-nail along his jawline. His stubble of day-old beard was beginning to itch. "Come on. I'll get you a cab."

Walking up the ramp to the street level, Tina Mikken-Bush finally asked, "Where *were* you all day? I was frantic. I called here, I called your office, but your secretary—"

"Didn't know," Shayne said gruffly. "I made a quick trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico, without telling her. You know anyone out there? A man named Robert Smith?"

"Robert Smith?" She seemed to taste the name. "New Mexico?" She shook her head. "I suppose I've been introduced to a hundred Robert Smiths through the years, but none from New Mexico."

Shayne waved down an empty cab, put Tina Mikken-Bush in it while keeping one eye peeled down the ramp to the rental car.

She stiffened suddenly and gasped, "The briefcase! My God, I forgot—"

"I'll sleep on it," Shayne said

flatly, stuffing her into the cab. "It'll be in the car when you pick it up in the morning. Good night."

He moved swiftly down the ramp. All he needed was some two-bit ripoff creep sliding along and lifting the briefcase. He took it upstairs, tossed it on his bed. There definitely was an odor about the pickup point—in Flagler Street by daylight, with the briefcase left on the front seat of a car parked in front of a building where a private detective involved in the case had his office.

There had to be a kicker in that kind of setup!

He went to the telephone, roused Oswald Foly out of bed. Foly—after a few mutterings—said he had heard of Robert Smith in Santa Fe, New Mexico, who did imitations in bronze. He understood Smith's work was far from being top drawer.

"Recall where you heard of Smith?" Shayne wanted to know.

"I believe Arthur once asked me about Mr. Smith's work. I was, and am, unfamiliar with it."

"That'd be Arthur Mikken-Bush."

"Certainly."

Shayne paced and smoked cigarettes most of the night. Twice he attempted to catnap.



Nothing—all of his schemes became too complicated. There was nothing fancy about the pickup as designed. So the counterattack should remain simple, too.

He telephoned Tim Rourke at four o'clock in the morning. The veteran newspaperman shook himself out of sleep and listened intently as the detective outlined his plan.

When Shayne finished, Rourke said, "This dude has to be a raw amateur, Mike, or trusting as hell. He has to know Tina Mikken-Bush inside out, how she thinks, how much traffic she'll stand to protect the piece. Man, if she even breathed on Will Gentry, he'd flood Flagler with his boys and you'd never spot one of them."

"Uh-huh," agreed Shayne. "It's probably a test, Tim. No more. The guy will be in the area, watching. He wants to see

f my client is going to play the game according to his rules. I doubt if he'll go near the heap. He'll hang around eagle-eyeing for cops, for me, for everybody. And he'll want to see who finally comes around to drive the car back to the rental place. If everything stays nice and quiet on this run, then he'll unload the real drop on her."

"Yeah," said Rourke, "it's gotta be that. Well, since you want me to be accompanied by a dame, I think I'll pick one of the better numbers from the office. I've got a hunch it's going to be a long day and I might as well—"

"Tim," Shayne interrupted, "play it damn close to the belt. Don't get careless. And be here in the basement garage by nine this morning. You'll see me talking to my client when she picks up the rental car. I'll have her give me a running start to the office. I want to be down there before she arrives."

"You trail her—and do a little praying to Lady Luck on the way. We have to have two parking slots in front of the building. If at all possible, get one ahead of her. You won't be quite so conspicuous as a stake-out then. And shoo your girl out of the car pronto after parking, have her hit one of the shops where she can get lost. You fidget—but keep an eye on

the car. Remember, you're supposed to be an agitated husband waiting for a shopping wife."

"Yeah, got it," Rourke said. "But how long do you want me to fidget? If this is a dry run, if somebody is eyeballing the scene and no more, he's gonna see us wheel in at the same time the Mikken-Bush dame shows. He'll keep one eye peeled on us. And no husband—I don't give a damn how henpecked he is—waits *all day* for a shopping wife."

"An hour," said Shayne. "No more."

"And then?"

"If this *isn't* a test run, then the guy is an amateur and he'll be amateur all the way. He'll make a dive for the car the minute Tina Mikken-Bush is out of sight and I'll handle him."

## XII

THE PICKUP MAN DIDN'T make an immediate dive. He waited twenty minutes. And he arrived in a cab. The cab stopped on the street beside the parked rental car and the man opened the rear door of the cab and paid the driver.

Shayne watched from his vantage just inside the street door of the building. He had the rental car, the cab and the man

in full view. He figured the man must have been in the area earlier, watched Tina Mikken-Bush park the rental car and walk away. He, too, had walked off a few blocks, then hailed a cab and returned.

Shayne also figured Tim Rourke as an ace-in-the-hole had taken on stature. The man had not spotted Rourke and his female friend and the newspaperman was parked in an extremely strategic spot two cars in front of the rental heap.

His actions put the pickup man in the gray area between amateur and professional. He wasn't a raw rookie—he had made a few smooth moves. But he was a space-shot away from being a sleek pro. On the other hand, his appearance triggered a glow of satisfaction inside the detective. It confirmed his speculation.

The detective had figured the man had an inside line to Tina Mikken-Bush. He had to, to know her thinking. He also had to have had access to her private telephone number—he'd used it.

Ted Socrates watched the cab roll away, then turned to the rental car. Shayne moved out of the building and across the sidewalk swiftly. But Socrates stopped him. Socrates came around the front of the rental car and up onto the sidewalk.

He wore a half smile, looked relaxed.

"Mr. *Shayne!*" he exclaimed. "Are you going out? I had hoped to catch you in your office. I want to talk to you about Laura. Perhaps she *did* commit suicide. Perhaps..."

He wagged his head as he moved inside the building. He walked toward the bank of elevators.

Mike Shayne started after him, then stopped dead in his tracks and looked back over his shoulder, just in time to see the young girl in scruffy bluejeans and floppy hat step off the sidewalk and around to the driver's door of the rental heap. She popped inside and the car moved almost immediately. She peeled tires leaving the parking slot.

Shayne was on the sidewalk when she hit the brakes. Tail-lights flashed and the rental car tilted forward. It slid into the side of the sedan Tim Rourke had pulled away from the curbing. Both cars rocked as they collided. There was a sound of crumpling metal mixed with the squeal of tires out in the traffic lane as other cars were braked.

Shayne ran to the rental car, yanked open the driver's door and caught the girl's leg as she scrambled across the front seat. She popped open the door on

the passenger side, but the detective had a firm grip on her. He pulled her back across the seat. She screamed and pulled the briefcase with her. Then she erupted in a string of epithets.

Rourke was with the detective. His mouth was bleeding. "Banged it on the steering wheel," he said.

Shayne put the girl's ankle in Rourke's hand. "Keep her!"

He raced down the street between parked cars and honking motorists. Socrates was tight against the buildings, scurrying along. Shayne spotted a parked pickup truck, vaulted into the bed and bounced down on the sidewalk. He slammed Socrates against a building wall, whipped a forearm across the man's throat and pinned him.

Socrates struggled briefly, then sagged. Shayne clamped a big hand on the back of his neck and waltzed him back to the office building. Rourke was at the entry, looking a little wild-eyed as he struggled with the flailing girl.

"Tell her to cool it, Socrates," Shayne growled, shaking the man.

Ted Socrates shuddered before he said simply, "It didn't work, Lisa."

The girl quit struggling, but she remained taut and bright-eyed. Her lips curved into a

sneer as she stared at the detective. She snorted and then went silent.

Shayne reached, took the briefcase from her. "Unless you're interested in old newspapers and magazines, there isn't anything in here for you, Mrs. Andreessen—or is it Miss Lane? There was a million bucks in the case last night, honey, but not today."

Ted Socrates and Lisa Lane had been a team from the top, working on the Mikken-Bush clan. It had been a two-pronged con attack, Socrates with Laura Mikken-Bush and Lisa with Phelps Baxter, the womanizer. One or the other—both if they were lucky, or perhaps leaned with a bit of blackmail—was going to come out of the relationship loaded with a bundle of cash.

Socrates, discovering Laura Mikken-Bush at a social function, had moved in first. Later, he had spotted Phelps Baxter for what he was, set up Lisa in a condominium. Then he got a break: there had been a blowup between Myra and Tina Mikken-Bush.

Socrates didn't know what had lighted the fuse but he overheard enough to know that Myra had decided to break out, leave the mansion, the anchor of Laura and her pills, the dominance of Tina. But she had

to have money to go on, and Tina had refused.

Myra had then turned to her husband. They were shedding Tina's cloak. The only trouble was, Phelps didn't share her enthusiasm. He rather liked being under protective financial covering. The result was, Myra had gone off on her own. No one knew where. She merely had packed a suitcase, stomped out of the house in a flame of anger. Ten days later she was back, the flame out, seemingly resigned, her old self.

But those ten days had been a golden path for Socrates and Lisa. They had allowed Socrates to dangle Lisa before Phelps. And Phelps had snapped.

Socrates and Lisa seemed headed for Easy Street, except. . .

Then had come the theft of the art piece, the bringing in of Shayne by Tina Mikken-Bush, the death of Laura. These were bombs to Socrates and Lisa. Too much was happening—and too fast. It was time to tuck in heads, to disappear. They had been on the verge of dropping out of sight over the horizon—almost cashless—when Tina Mikken-Bush's determination to retrieve the Lysippus made her ripe for extortion.

So the telephone call, the demand for a million dollars,

had followed. Socrates had figured Tina Mikken-Bush would not go to the police. She had shown a disdain for police at the time of the theft and there was no reason to think she'd turn to them for recovery of the Lysippus.

But she probably would turn to her private detective. Okay, why not use him? Put the play at his front door, confuse him, make a feint of a pickup, then lure him inside the building. The detective was unaware of the Socrates-Lisa Lane tie, and all the girl needed was a few seconds to dive into the rental car and drive away. Socrates and Lisa could get together later.

"I don't have the statuette, Shayne," Socrates said with a lift of his hands. "We were working on a *situation*, that's all."

"Yeah, I know," said the redhead, in deep thought. He sat slouched low in the chair behind his desk. Socrates and the girl sat opposite him. Socrates was loose, resigned. The girl was uptight, didn't like being under wraps.

"You'd have disappeared the night you got the Lysippus out of the safe," the redhead continued. "Hell, with that thing in his pocket, a man could sit months, two, three, five years maybe, then drag it out and

peddle it. Or if he wants the green now, he doesn't have to go back to the Mikken-Bush people. There are other markets. I've talked to a couple of them."

"Exactly," said Socrates. He stood up.

Shayne lifted an eyebrow. "Where the hell do you think you're going?"

The girl stood beside Socrates, shifting her weight from one foot to another. She snarled, "Get off our backs, creep! What can you prove?"

### XIII

SHAYNE TOOK THE .45 from his shoulder holster and put it on his desk. The girl's eyes became circles. He picked up the telephone and called Will Gentry. "I have a package for you—attempted extortion." Then he looked straight at Lisa Lane and added, "And the driver of the car involved in a traffic accident. I don't think she has a license."

"Oh, God!" she snapped and turned to leave. Socrates grabbed her wrist.

"Sit," he said, pulling her down into the chair. He was calm, almost smiling. "We are in a grey area," he said. "Nothing gained, nothing to lose—except a little time, perhaps. The police will want to talk to

us. But, as you said, my dear, what can they prove? It will be little more than an... well, let's say, an inconvenience for a few days."

Shayne snorted. "Socrates, I've got to hand you something—you're an expert at being in-between."

"I live, Mr. Shayne." He nodded with a smile.

The redhead snapped to his feet, whipped up the .45 and jammed it into the shoulder rig under his coat. "And I have some unfinished business," he said grimly. "You and your friend can wait here for Chief Gentry or you can fly. Your choice."

"Oh, you know what we are going to do," said Socrates, continuing to smile and settling even lower in his chair.

Lucy Hamilton sat straight-backed at her typewriter. She looked prepared to take a string of instructions, but Shayne merely jammed on his hat and marched past her. "Gentry is coming here to pick up those two in my office," he said flatly. "Tell him I'll be in touch later."

"Yes, Michael."

Shayne prepared the .45 for possible use while driving to the Mikken-Bush mansion. He entered the house with a scowl.

Walter, the butler, backed off in surprise as Tina Mikken-Bush swept down the hallway

toward the detective. "What happened, Mr. Shayne?" she demanded. Bluntness was edged with caution.

The detective ignored her question, snapped, "Myra? Phelps? They're here?"

"Yes."

"Gather the clan," he said with a wave of his arm. He marched to the stairwell, turned into the library. Phelps Baxter came out of a chair immediately. He held an open newspaper, cocked his head. He suddenly looked frightened. Shayne said nothing.

Tina and Myra Mikken-Bush finally appeared, side by side. Tina had gone stone-faced. Myra was nervous, her hands fluttering. She seemed unable to keep her feet still.

Shayne eyed each of them before he said flatly, "We have theft of a valuable statuette and we have murder. We have theft because someone will need money and we have murder because the thief was watched by Laura. It's that simple."

"Laura, unfortunately, came downstairs—probably in a pill-fogged condition—the night of the theft, the night the electricity was briefly shut off. She saw the thief making the exchange of a fake Lysippus for the real one. But she didn't realize what she was seeing."

"Realization came later, after

the theft was discovered. Only then did Laura recall. Still, she wasn't sure. Nothing was too clear to her. So she made a fatal mistake. She confronted the thief. Result? She was murdered, pills stuffed down her throat. How am I doing?"

Shayne's eyes flashed across the trio. No one moved, no one said anything.

He continued, "Ted Socrates was the pigeon. He was living here, was not clan. So set him up for a fall. Make the thief, the murderer, an *outsider*."

"Too, an insider isn't going to come up with a crude fake made by an amateur in Santa Fe, New Mexico. From an insider's point of view there is no reason to use an imitation. Only an outsider would think of a fake. He might want one thinking it might gain him a day or two of escape edge."

"On the other hand, Ted Socrates is not an artsy man. The only way he'd recognize a masterpiece is if someone pointed arrows toward it. It follows he wouldn't know about imitators—especially those who work in bronze and fake the work of Lysippus. These people are few and far between, I understand."

"So we go back to insiders, to someone who lives in this house, someone who was here when Arthur Mikken-Bush was

alive, someone who heard him discussing, at one time or another, a Robert Smith in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Now *that* someone could have slipped out to Santa Fe, had an imitation made, then killed the artist to ensure silence. Of course, someone who would go those extremes would have to have real motive—like an independent life, free of Mikken-Bush tentacles, but *with* some Mikken-Bush cash. Right, Phelps?”

Shayne waved a hand. “Let’s put it this way, pal. You’ve been living in this house for a long time. You knew Arthur. You may not be hung up on art, but you’d listened to him, probably heard about this Robert Smith in New Mexico.

“You also like dames, youngies. And there’s this Lisa Lane or Andreesen or whatever you want to call her. You two hit it off. So, maybe with a quickie move, you can put together a pocketful of bread *and* the girl, cut, go off to live in—”

Baxter broke. He shot toward the doorway. Mike Shayne yanked out the .45 and plunged after him. He landed on Baxter’s back, drove him into the thick carpeting. As they went down, Shayne lost the gun. It sailed away from them.

“You’re *crazy*, Shayne!” cried the struggling man.

“So why fly, pal?” growled the redhead.

“Because he’s frightened.”

The voice was steady, the words precise and pinched off. Shayne turned his head slowly and looked up at Myra Mikken-Bush. She held the .45. The muzzle was pointed straight at him.

“Get up,” she said. “Free my husband.”

Shayne rolled from Baxter’s back. Baxter sat up, grasped his knees. “Myra, what’s—”

“Be quiet!” she said. “You go with me or you don’t. Make the decision now. The Lysippus is upstairs in our room, in the pillow on my side of the bed. You can get it or not.”

“Myra?” Tina Mikken-Bush put in.

“Shut up! I’ve heard all I’m ever going to hear from you!”

“But. . . Laura?”

“It was necessary,” Myra said flatly. “It was as Mr. Shayne said. Laura came downstairs at the wrong time. She may or may not have remembered—or even cared. But I couldn’t take a chance. She’s been dead for years anyway, Tina. It was just a matter of when she quit breathing. After Phelps and I leave tonight, you can decide when you want to bring the notoriety down on the Mikken-Bush name.

“Phelps, go upstairs, get the

Lysippus from the pillow. There's also a packed suitcase in the closet. Bring it. You'll like it. It contains money, cash, an accumulation. When it runs out, we always can sell the Lysippus—that is, if you can learn to curb your leaning toward young girls."

He didn't move a muscle. He sat on the carpeting, legs straight out in front of him. He stared.

"Phelps?"

"Y-you—killed Laura?" he managed.

She pointed the .45 at him. "Get up," she said.

He stood quickly.

She looked at Shayne, glanced at her sister. "All of us are going upstairs," she said. "It has become obvious that I am leaving alone."

"Not really, Myra," Shayne said.

He took a step. She recoiled instantly, the gun muzzle swinging straight to his middle.

He took another step.

"No!" she cried.

And then she squeezed the trigger. There was a loud click.

Shayne walked to her, took the empty gun from her hand. "The bullets are in my pocket, Myra. I removed them on my way here."



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## A CLIMATE FOR MURDER

*The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel*

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

*Like so many of the redhead's cases, this one appears to be deceptively simple at first glance. But when violent death makes its presence felt, finding and bringing the murderer to justice proves to be among Shayne's most difficult tasks, as well as one of the most dangerous of his long career. Shayne at his hard-hitting best.*

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# THE QUICK AND THE JUST

by ROY ARMSTRONG II

*Sammy Hipp was the type of attorney for whom a murder trial is only a game. It never occurred to him that his genteel client was playing for keeps!*

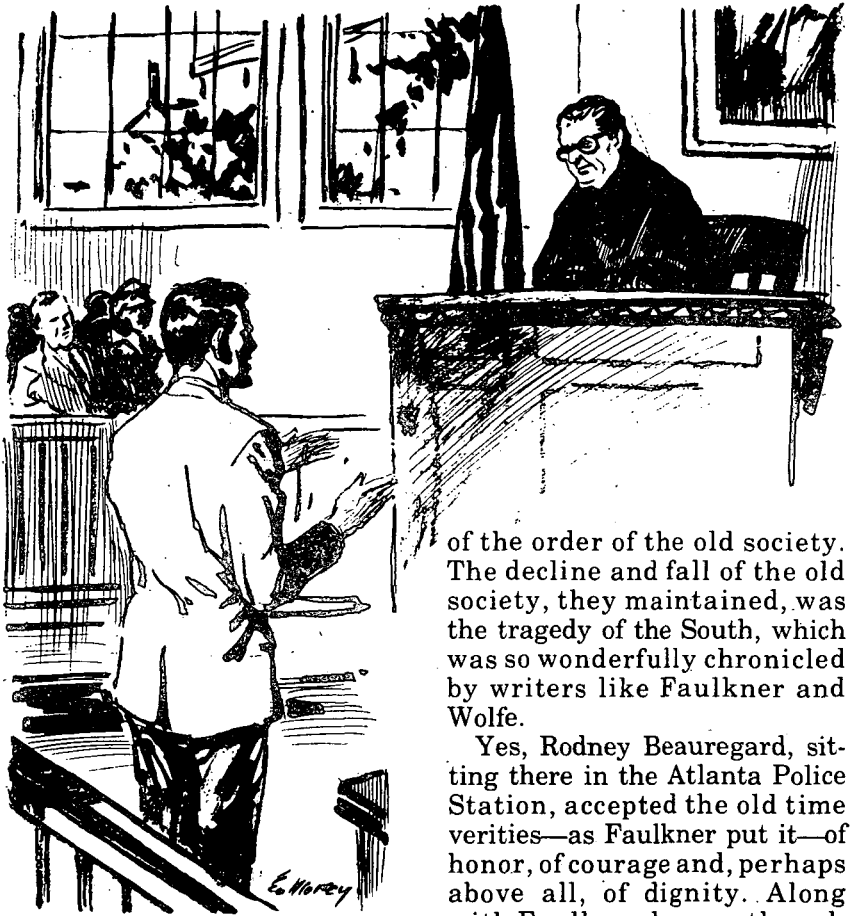
AT A TABLE SCARRED with numerous cigaret burns, sat Rodney Beauregard, a Professor Emeritus of American literature. He was in a small room in the Central Atlanta Police Station, a room with one window giving a view of downtown Atlanta. It was raining, and the streets and buildings, as viewed through the window, assumed a strange colorless quality, as if the rain was draining the city of life.

Dr. Beauregard reflected that the dull gray of the ubiquitous cement was polished gray by the rain, like the gray of tombstones. Even the people scurrying around in the downpour were bloodless, resembling manipulated mani-

kins rather than real-life human beings. The only colors were neon signs and their distorted reflections in the wet streets; there were no green trees or blue sky, only the dull gray of the sky, the shiny gray of the cement, and the grotesque lights.

For a man in his predicament, Dr. Beauregard seemed unconcerned. He was under arrest, charged with first degree murder. Yet he did not appear desperate or dejected, as one would expect, but rather anticipatory, even excited. Actually, he was more excited than his decorous, professorial bearing would indicated.

Dr. Beauregard was the epitome of the gentleman schol-



ar, the Southern aristocrat, affluent through inheritance and intellectually born of the literary tradition of the Agrarians of Vanderbilt University of the 1920's, who clung to an aristocratic vision of the South as virtually a feudal society and argued for a continuation

of the order of the old society. The decline and fall of the old society, they maintained, was the tragedy of the South, which was so wonderfully chronicled by writers like Faulkner and Wolfe.

Yes, Rodney Beauregard, sitting there in the Atlanta Police Station, accepted the old time verities—as Faulkner put it—of honor, of courage and, perhaps above all, of dignity. Along with Faulkner he saw the collapse of these verities as being the tragedy, not just of the South, but of America.

Looking through the window at the dismal gray scene, Rodney Beauregard sadly remembered the Faulknerian chronicle. The son of grandeur, Quentin Compson, committed

suicide, the son of a stagnant Mississippi swamp, Flem Snopes, inherited the South. Honor became cynical corruption, courage became dumb-animal cunning, dignity became middle-class piggery. But, Rodney Beauregard reflected, there was still a vestige of the old order, and people like himself had to fight for the old, even in the face of cancrioid Snopesism.

Quite appropriately, Rodney Beauregard's physical appearance was gentle, his clothing softly subtle. His hair was mostly gray, with only some pepper black showing. He wore it short, with a neat part—there was no hint of chic sideburns, of length. Boyishly round, his face was lined, but gently so, as though the aging process for him was one of pleasant maturation, not dying. Dark brown, his eyes were deep, sagacious. Faithfully, or stubbornly, he wore the tweed coat and flannel slacks of the 1930's. His tie was a narrow stripe, his shirt white and buttoned-down.

Only one aspect of Rodney Beauregard was incongruent with his gentleman-scholar appearance—his hands. Wide, thick, they were the hands of a laborer, a carpenter, a bricklayer, not a professor. But one could understand the overbear-

ing strength of those hands, if one knew that Rodney Beauregard was not adverse to manual labor.

Hard work was a timeless verity, not to be avoided by a believer in the old order. On his farm a few miles from the University where he taught, Rodney Beauregard plowed, sowed and harvested annually as though this ritual could join him—however fragily—to the past he never really knew but still revered.

Gracefully, Rodney Beauregard with his big, strong hands was lighting his professorial pipe when he heard sounds in the hall outside which caused him to tremble with anticipation—the clop sounds of steel heel taps on the hard floor. His glance moved from the window to the narrow door. Suddenly, it opened and the lawyer Sammy Hipp strode in, carrying the aegis of his profession, the attaché case.

Sammy Hipp was a model of contemporary style. His hair was longish and professionally styled, and he wore a full but rather affected mustache. His suit was “mod”, with matching tie and shirt. He wore ankle boots of shiny black patent leather.

Hipp was a big man with a full square face and a very strong chin. Indeed, his appear-

ance was that of the successful professional athlete, radiating confidence, strength and new-won affluence. Dr. Beauregard smiled to himself. Second or third generation Flem Snopes, he thought.

"Dr. Beauregard," said Hipp in a strong PR tone, "I came as soon as I got your message." He shook Rodney's hand firmly and then opened the attaché case with much ostentatious snapping of clasps. The case sounded expensive.

"I'm glad you're here," said Rodney Beauregard, puffing on his pipe.

"Well, I must say that you don't appear to be very concerned about your situation."

"I'm not now."

"I hope I can justify your confidence. But I should point out that you appear to be in quite a mess." While speaking, Hipp rummaged around in the attaché case.

"What are you looking for, Mr. Hipp?" Rodney Beauregard asked.

Surprised at the question, Sammy Hipp replied, "*This*," handing him a sheet of paper. Dr. Beauregard scanned it. It was a financial agreement obligating him to pay a huge sum as a retainer for the legal services of Sammy Hipp.

"That okay with you?"

"Before I sign this, shouldn't

we discuss my case at least briefly. Perhaps you might not wish to defend me."

"What's to discuss. You can pay, can't you?"

"Yes. But you already knew that, didn't you?"

"Sure," said Hipp, smiling. "You think I'd come up here if I hadn't checked that out."

"I suppose not. But don't you want to talk about the case first?"

"The only thing I need to talk about is money."

"Don't you want to know if I'm guilty or not," said Rodney Beauregard, almost laughing.

"Oh, you're guilty all right, guilty as sin," said Sammy, casually sitting on the edge of the table. "But that doesn't really make much difference. So what that three people saw you shoot Dr. Bound. By the way, why did you shoot him?" Sammy appeared not much interested in Dr. Beauregard's reply.

"I shot him because he was a thief. He recently published a scholarly work on Faulkner. And every idea in the work he stole from me. Some from carefully manipulated conversations over coffee. Others from actual written notes which he surreptitiously obtained."

"And you shot him for *that*!" said Sammy incredulously.

"He was a parasitic leach, a

discredit to his profession and to the human race."

"So you figured you'd become God and take him right out. Well, this one wins the flaky cake prize. But never fear, I'll get you out. But first, sign the agreement."

"You can get me out?"

"Sure. Oh, you might serve a little time, but not much."

Dr. Beauregard paused for a moment, then signed the agreement. Smiling, Sammy returned it to the attaché case and closed it. "I'll see you in a few days," he said. "I'll have to look into the situation to see what we're going to do."

He shook hands before leaving. Dr. Beauregard smiled contentedly as he listened to the steel heel taps receding on the hard floor. Then a guard entered the room and took him to his cell.

SURPRISINGLY, Dr. Beauregard seemed content, almost happy, after his meeting with Sammy. His cell, dull and lifeless gray as it was, seemed as comfortable to him as his cozy, book-lined den at home. Leaning back on the hard cot and puffing on his pipe, he read some Faulkner and H. L. Mencken. He smiled as he reread Mencken's *American Culture*—Mencken could see right through the whole phony Ameri-

can mystique, he thought. And he let them know about it.

Great writer, Mencken—used the essay as a weapon, like Addison and Steele of the 18th century. Yes, you've got to fight them, the great gangling herd that has taken over the country, that's almost ruined it. Smiling, Dr. Beauregard read on.

During the days before his next meeting with Sammy, Dr. Beauregard did little but read. He did become acquainted with one of the guards, the one who had escorted him to the first meeting with Hipp. This guard, a large young man, was going to night school and welcomed the opportunity to talk to a man of Dr. Beauregard's reputation, who was able to help the young man with some of his compositional problems. He also recommended a couple of rhetorics and a grammar. The young man was appreciative and became devoted to Dr. Beauregard. Naturally he was upset by Beauregard's apparent lack of concern about his situation.

One day, the guard asked if there was anything he could do. "How about your family? Is there anyone I could contact for you?"

Amused by the concern of his young friend, Dr. Beauregard replied, "I don't really have any

family. You see, my wife has been an invalid since the birth of our daughter twenty years ago. And my daughter unfortunately is confined to an institution and probably will be for the rest of her life."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"That's all right. Don't be concerned. I'm resigned to my situation. But perhaps I can do something about it."

"Your daughter?"

"Yes. Perhaps I can help her in my own way." Dr. Beauregard smiled at the younger man, who didn't pursue the matter further.

At the next meeting with his lawyer, Dr. Beauregard was surprised to find Sammy already in the room when he entered.

"Have a seat, Rodney. Let's get with it." Sammy was excited, eager to plan the defense. Dr. Beauregard winced at the use of his first name. He sat down and lit his pipe.

"Jesus, can't you guys do nothing without lighting up! We got work to do. I think I got an angle for your defense."

"Really," said Rodney Beauregard in a flat tone.

"Yeah. I been looking into the background of your late colleague, Dr. Bound. You remember him, the one you shot full of holes." Sammy laughed cynically.

"Well, it seems the scholarly Dr. Bound, as well as being a plagiarist, also took quite an interest in the little cuties in his class. An interest, you might say, beyond the license of his professional position. There's one girl in particular, a Miss Donna Jones, that he took advantage of. And she's pretty upset about it. Must not have given her the A he promised." He paused. "You know this girl, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, according to her, she went to you in tears to complain about what had happened. Was she lying, or is that right? It doesn't really matter which is true, but I've got to know."

"She came to me as she said."

"Good! That's it, man! We're home free."

"What do you mean?"

"We've got our defense. Now let's get the scenario down pat. This is what happened—this young broad comes to you in tears. She's a Southern Belle in the old tradition. Yeah, that's *it*! I'll get a couple of old babes on the jury, and they'll eat that up like sows at the trough.

"Okay, she comes to you. She tells you what's happened. She's like a daughter to you. You're appalled. There's honor in your profession, an unwritten code of conduct which is stronger than the actual law.

Your initial shock leads to psychotic anger. You lose control—you go blank.

"Southern gentleman that you are, you must right this heinous wrong. Driven by an irresistible impulse—we've got to drum that phrase—*irresistible impulse*—which transcends legal right and wrong, blindly, you go to Bound's office and shoot him five times. Five times—that was good thinking. It fits in with you're being out of it. One time, and we'd have some trouble."

"But what about his stealing my material?" interrupted Dr. Beauregard.

"That doesn't compute. It doesn't make much sense. Frankly, I can't believe that you could kill a man for something like that. Hell, stealing is as American as apple pie. If we go before a jury with something like that, they'll put you in the electric chair. You see, they wouldn't care at all about something like that. They wouldn't have any excuse, no gimmick to let you go. But my way, they'll almost give you a medal."

"I see," said Dr. Beauregard. "So *your* defense—*my* defense—is temporary insanity."

"No, not quite. That's too risky. With temporary insanity, they'd either have to let you go

completely, with no strings, or find you guilty of first degree murder. No, our defense will be insanity, period."

"You mean I would be legally insane at the time of the verdict."

"That's right."

"But—"

"Yeah, you'd have to serve a couple of years at the most. But not in prison—in the state hospital. Which is a horror show for most people, but with your bread, it would be a vacation. You might get out in six months or so."

"How would I *get* out?"

"Well, after an appropriate interval the state shrink would declare you sane. And you'd be out—home free."

"What's wrong with temporary insanity?"

"Like I said, it's too risky. Look, Dr. Beauregard, you killed somebody. I don't really know why. But whatever the reason, you're guilty of first degree murder. And the jury can't just let you walk out after doing something like that. It's a game, see? And you've got to put in a little time in the penalty box."

"Deep down, they'll know you're really guilty as the devil. But they won't admit it even to themselves—especially not to themselves. So they'll take the gimmick I give them. That

way, they can virtually let you go, but still compensate for their own guilt feelings at what they've done. And everybody's happy, see?"

"Mr. Hipp, you've deified cynicism and cunning and destroyed justice."

"There's no justice, and anyone who thinks there is is a naïve fool. So what you say doesn't bother me a damn bit. Like I said, it's a game. It's a business like everything else. And you've got to be quick, *quick!* That's what wins, that's what makes the big money."

Sammy paused and wiped his brow with a silk handkerchief. Then he looked at Dr. Beauregard with the most cynical expression the professor had ever seen. "Hell, you're doing all right, aren't you? You'll be getting away with first degree murder." Sammy laughed harshly.

"Yes, I'll be getting away with first degree murder."

AFTER SAMMY'S careful preparation, the trial was an anticlimax. It went so smoothly, so precisely according to plan, that Dr. Beauregard began to believe Sammy had some kind of supernatural powers.

Donna Jones, dressed in soft pastels, was the storybook picture of the innocent young girl. One could almost palpably

sense the hatred of the jury for the late Dr. Bound. The D.A. was helpless in the face of what he must have known was a virtual fraud. Any questions he asked the young woman only antagonized the jury towards him, so carefully had Sammy arranged and directed the scene. She was the gimmick, the integral cog of "the way out" for the jury, Dr. Beauregard thought.

Sammy thought it better not to put Dr. Beauregard on the stand. Nevertheless, Dr. Beauregard had his part to play, carefully directed by Sammy Hipp. His eyes were filled with tears during the girl's testimony. His appearance and clothing were slightly amiss, to suggest continuing disorientation. One collar point remained unbuttoned, he wore a slight "five o'clock shadow," his clothing was slightly rumpled.

The star of the whole proceeding was, of course, Sammy Hipp. Gone was the blatant cynicism. Now he was the honest, hardworking young lawyer, who wanted to see the spirit of the law prevail, to see what was right prevail. And the jury ate it up.

*My God!* thought Dr. Beauregard, *can't they see what's going on? Can't they see through him? But they don't*

*want to see through him—they want to believe in him because he's one of them. He's a product of the gangling herd, a hero of the gangling herd, and they want to see him succeed. He's a hero for those fools on the jury, a hero with black patent leather boots!*

Dr. Beauregard was moved to laugh, but caught himself and reverted to his role as created by Sammy.

The verdict was as predictable as last week's stock quotations—not guilty by reason of insanity, defendant to be taken to the state hospital for the insane until judged competent to return to society. The game was over for Sammy, and he had won exactly as he said he would. He shook hands with the D.A.—they looked like two amiable football coaches after a big game. The D.A. didn't seem too upset.

*It must be just a game to him, also, thought Dr. Beauregard.*

Shortly after the delivery of the verdict, Sammy met Rodney Beauregard in a small chamber off the courtroom. Sammy wanted to get their financial arrangements finalized, but Dr. Beauregard said something, which changed the course of their meeting.

"You know, Mr. Hipp, I've never seen you in better form except once."

"Really?" Sammy sounded somewhat surprised and puzzled. "When did you ever see me before?"

"Oh, I saw your first big case—The Johnson Corner Boys." Dr. Beauregard smiled.

"You saw that? I don't remember you, but I don't guess I would." Sammy Hipp was reaching for something he couldn't quite put his finger on, something lurking in the quiet shadows of his memory, something ominous.

"You remember the five boys who picked up the two girls at the drive-in and took them out against their wills and horribly raped them."

"Wait a minute!" said Sammy, reverting to form. "They were accused of rape, but the jury found them not guilty. So they're not guilty."

"As I'm not guilty," Dr. Beauregard smiled.

"Yes," Sammy feeling more uneasy.

"That was just another game?"

"Yes, dammit, just a game! It's *all* a game." Sammy was angry, not at Dr. Beauregard, but at his own inability to grasp what was going on.

"One thing I never understood about that case—why did you defend those boys? They had no money. Were you moved by some evangelical fervor?"

"A brilliant literary scholar like you ought to be able to figure that one out. Sure, those guys were guilty. If anybody ever deserved to burn in hell, it was them.

"So what kind of lawyer could get them out of that mess?" Sammy asked rhetorically. "The *best*—that's what kind!"

"So you took that case to make your reputation."

"That's right, Rodney, old boy. So then guys who are guilty as hell but with loads of bread—guys like you—would come to me for help. I'm the guy who got the Johnson Corner Boys off! And anybody who can do that can get anybody off!"

"Anybody who can pay."

"Yeah, anybody who can pay."

"Do you remember the two girls in the case?"

"No. Why should I?"

"I remember one very well. She was a beautiful young thing—Soft, sweet, with a classical charm and character. Something you wouldn't know anything about."

Sammy Hipp looked sick; he was beginning to remember. With his silk handkerchief, he wiped the sweat from his forehead.

Dr. Beauregard continued, "But all that beauty, all that

promise, was wiped out, destroyed by those barbarians. Now she doesn't think, doesn't speak. She's simply a blob of protoplasm."

"She was... she was..." Sammy Hipp couldn't finish.

"Yes, she was my daughter."

"I didn't *know*! I mean how *could* I have known?"

"What difference would it have made whether you knew or not. It's all just a *game*, isn't it?"

"No!"

"Maybe it *is* a game, Mr. Hipp. But if it *is*, you're in a mess, Mr. Hipp. Because I've been playing the game, too."

"No!" Sammy yelled as he groped behind him for the door.

"I'm legally insane, you stupid fool—you *ape*. And they'll probably give me a medal for breaking your neck."

He was on him, the big powerful hands around Sammy's neck, strangling him, then snapping his spine.

Before the guards rushed in, Dr. Beauregard looked out the window. The sky was sun-filled, a bright, natural blue. The wonderful overhanging firmament, he thought. The people appeared to be full of life as they scurried around the streets. *Man shall not only endure, but prevail*, thought Rodney Beauregard, remembering his prophet Faulkner.

# NIGHT DOGS

*The patrol car looked like salvation to the Barnhills after Liz lost the highway on a dark Florida night. But the driver led them into a hound-haunted nightmare of horror.*

by JERRY JACOBSON

THE FORBIDDING SOUTHERN sky was gun-metal gray and brooding purple against a pale cast of a Florida moon, and the sedan rushed beneath it like a yellow bullet hugging the ground. The woman was driving. Her husband, a white cane cradled between his sprawled legs, dozed fitfully.

The car's radio scratched out disturbing, forlorn bluegrass music, a constant reminder to the travelers that they were still caught deep in a land of leaning cabins, baying hounds, moonshine whisky and tangles of trees weeping strangling green tears on the roadways.

The danger around them

could be sensed but not seen, felt but not touched. But there. Somewhere. The woman could feel it as the man slept. It was like the fear one felt as a foreigner moving in the confusing landscape of another country.

The woman's eyes blanched as the static from the radio increased. They were pulling from its moody grasp and it was not happy.

The brackish sounds stirred the man and he woke groggily, feeling for his cane.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"I don't know, John. I missed the main highway back a ways."



"Hmph," said the man, though without malice. "What was the last town we passed through?"

"Tallahassee," said the woman, not taking her eyes from the snaking, barely visible narrow road. "About sixty miles. We're between two hillsides, I think. Every so often you can see them through the trees."

"Probably the reason for all the static. You had an Alabama or Georgia station. Why the hell is it, when you need a specialist, his practice is two thousand—"

"John, we agreed on Shulper," the woman interrupted firmly, but not in anger. "The best man using the laser treatments, no matter where."

"Florida!" the man grumbled.

"Couldn't be Cleveland or St. Paul. Has to be way the hell down. . ."

"Lots of elderly people live in Florida, John. Lots of eyes growing dim in the face of old age. That's why Shulper is practicing there."

"Okay, okay, you've proved your point," the man said. "What's the countryside look like?"

"Well, the roads are rotten.

Honestly, I don't think any of them have been repaired since Ponce de Leon crossed over them on his way to the fountain of youth. And the weepy, cluttry trees—I can hardly see a thing."

"Nothing worth seeing," said the man. "Just follow the road until it dumps us back onto a main highway. And don't stop for anything or anybody. You never know about places like this."

The phrase stopped the woman's heart cold. *You never know about places like this.* Maybe Elvira had found out—about places like this. How long had it been now since she was first reported missing? Nearly two years. It seemed like ten. But then that was the way time dragged when it was a bad-time, when you existed in it under the spectre of pain and the possibility of loss.

Elvira was the woman's sister. She had been on her way to Coral Gables for her annual vacation from her job in the city tax assessor's office. By herself. Elvira was the woman's widowed older sister, whose children were grown and moved away, and she didn't want to be a burden. So she always took her vacations by herself and let her children visit her.

But driving *alone* wasn't the best way. She disappeared.

Alone, somewhere between Council Bluffs and Coral Gables. Perhaps in countryside like this and on roads like these, she had simply disappeared. She never reached Coral Gables. Nor did her little green Volvo, which fairly eliminated the slim chance that her car had been stolen and that she was all right, and would one day turn up somewhere with a full explanation.

But one day turned into ten. And then the ten dragged into fifty. And then the fifty became a hundred. For a while, they thought that perhaps Elvira had *wanted* to become lost. Thousands of Americans did that every year—became lost for their own purposes, took new names and identities.

But to the woman, her sister did not seem the type to go through all that deception for whatever reason. Elvira had always been a simple, straight-from-the-shoulder type of woman. No. If she had become lost or delayed, it would have been against her own wishes and designs.

"Slow down," said the man abruptly, out of the smothering darkness. "A road sign coming up on the right."

The woman hit the brakes inexpertly. The car lurched like a boat impacting a pier.

The man read, "Welcome to

Tranquil, Florida, Population 585'. Tranquil, hell! It ought to be called Deceased." He fumbled for a cigaret in the top pocket of his mackinaw jacket. It had grown cold suddenly and he'd slipped it on. Somewhere in Georgia the car's heater had conked out. "What's the time?" he asked.

"A little before midnight."

"How are we for gas?"

"About a quarter of a tank. But the needle is quivering."

"Well, keep it under thirty until we get out the back door of this jungle and find an all-night service station."

"If we ever *reach* the town so we can drive out of it," the woman said. "I'll say one thing for the residents of Tranquil. They certainly believe in privacy—or secrets. I haven't seen a house anywhere."

"Hill people always build back in the hills. Most of them acquire the habit of enterprise outside the bounds of the law. Poaching, moonshining, mining on state land. You don't build on a highway and put up a sign for any of that."

"I suppose not, John."

THEY WENT FIVE MORE miles before the siren split the night's tense calm.

"Maybe it's an ambulance. Slow down and let it pass."

The woman eased off on the



gas pedal. The car loomed in her rear view mirror. And stayed there.

"It's a police patrol car, John. And it doesn't look like he's at all interested in anything beyond us."

The man slammed the head of his cane into the dashboard angrily. "Jerk highway cowboy! Pull over, Liz. Tranquil probably needs a new condensor for the whisky still. Or a new shack to store the sidewalk every night. Be charming."

"How much charm?"

"Give him the June Allyson sunflower innocence for openers," the man said. "Then play it by ear from there."

In a minute they could hear the patrolman's steps moving up on their car. He was a big-faced man—youngish. His right hand was on the butt of his holstered pistol.

"License, Ma'am?"

"Of course." When Liz handed it out the window, she peered at the officer's name tag, but it was too dark to be read. His pistol had a pearl handle. "Excuse me, officer," Liz said civilly, "but I can't quite read the name on your name tag."

"Ma'am, this here is an arrest," said the young, drawling voice. "Not a spelling contest."

"I think federal and state law require that you identify yourself." The woman heard her husband's tense voice across the car seat.

Liz saw the officer glare across her profile. When he spoke, there was an antagonistic edge in his tone. "The name's Stringer," he snapped. "Deputy Sheriff T.K. Stringer, Tranquil Police Department. Now, if *that's* cleared up, let's just get to the identification of *you* two nice folks. License says you're Elizabeth Barnhill. Photo checks with your own features."

"Wonderful!" Liz said. "This is my husband, John Barnhill."

Liz didn't like the sound of T.K.'s amused laugh.

"Well, well," T.K. Stringer

said. "John and Elizabeth Barnhill of Ann Arbor, Michigan." He handed the license back. "Long way from home."

"We're going to a medical clinic in Miami Beach," said Liz. "For an operation for my husband."

"That a fact, now? Mr. Barnhill, I'll just have to see *your* driver's license, too."

"My husband has no license," Liz told him. "He's nearly blind."

The deputy's laugh turned mildly skeptical. "That a fact, now? You two wouldn't be trying to sell me any wolf tickets here, would you?"

Liz's face screwed up. "*Wólf tickets?*"

"Southern colloquialism," said John Barnhill. "I think it means 'pulling your leg.'"

"My husband has his cane right there between his legs," Liz Barnhill told the deputy, in an edgy tone. "And he has a picture of his guide dog in his wallet."

The deputy smiled. "Well now, I'd sure like to see *that*. I'm quite partial to dogs myself."

John Barnhill sighed and handed Liz his wallet. "Show him, honey."

Deputy Stringer spent a minute examining the photo and then turned it back. "Yes-sir," he said, "not a bad-looking shepherd. What's his name?"



"Ruggar," John Barnhill said.

"We keep a few dogs ourselves," said T.K. Stringer, in obvious pride. "Out back of the city jail. Eight of them. We work them in a pack, sometimes rent them out to the state prison just over North Blue Ridge about eight miles. When they have escapes."

"Hounds?" said John Barnhill, attempting as slyly as he could to divert the deputy's attention.

T.K. Stringer chuckled again. "Mr. Barnhill," he said, "hounds are for hunting *animals*. These are manhunters, killer dogs. You see, a hound will give up on a man. They got lazy blood in 'em. But dobermans—these is dobermans—why, they'll track a man until they drop or get dragged off. Back a while, we

had us three brothers escape from the state prison. By the name of Motes. Mean boys, the Motes. Did some robberies and some killings. Tracked those three Motes boys five days with the pack. Got them all. Three different days, going in three different directions. Yessir, it's the *men* who keep hounds going. But it's *dobermans* keep the men on the move. Now folks—if you'll just get out of your car. . ."

"Get out?" Liz said.

"For a look-see in the trunk," said T.K. Stringer. "Law requires it. Hell, up to me, I'd just as soon skip it. But I don't make no laws."

"Now?"

"Yes, Ma'am. If you would."

John Barnhill remained inside. He heard rummaging at the car's rear. And he heard

dogs barking distantly. *The dobermans*, he thought. In another minute he heard the trunk being slammed and two sets of footsteps coming up to the front. But Liz wasn't getting back inside. He sensed that she was being restrained from doing so.

T.K. Stringer said, "Now, Mr. Barnhill, if you'll just slide across the seat and get out on this side, we can all be getting downtown to write up this citation."

For the moment, John Barnhill stayed where he was. "We have the right, I believe, to be told what we've done wrong here."

"Explain all that downtown, Mr. Barnhill," said T.K. Stringer, "Sheriff Harley Stringer—me and Joby's uncle—he makes all the procedures. Me and Joby, we just follow them out."

"Your *uncle*... is the sheriff?" said John Barnhill.

"Yessir, he is for a fact. And Joby, he's my kid brother. Now folks, I didn't intend for this to be a long discussion of the Stringer family tree. Point of Tranquil law is, you was doing forty-eight miles-per-hour in a fifteen M.P.H. zone."

Liz Barnhill said timidly. "But I wasn't going any faster than thirty. I distinctly recall my husband *telling me* to slow

down, because we were low on gas."

"Well, we'll straighten all that out down at the city jail," said T.K. lightly. "Mr. Barnhill? If you'll come out of the car now, we can get her locked up and get on into town. You can be sure we don't want to delay you folks any more than is absolutely necessary."

"JOBY GOT US a couple of law violators here. Say they're John and Elizabeth Barnhill, of Ann Arbor, Michigan."

"Do they?" said a voice similar to T.K.'s but slightly younger and less vicious. "Saying and being, well now them is two entirely different things."

That brought a long laugh from T.K. "Boy they is for a fact, Joby! They is for a fact!"

"Well, we'll just get a charge sheet heated up in the old typewriter here," Joby said.

When he felt T.K. move away. John Barnhill found Liz's hand and gave it a squeeze. He whispered, "What kind of place are we in?"

"Room back of a service station," she whispered back. "That small room we came through first was the office."

"What does the town look like?"

"John, it was too dark to tell hardly anything. I saw a two-story wood-frame house set up

on a rise, just down from a little grocery store. That's only thirty feet or so from here. The pumps are rusted. I don't think they've pumped so much as a gallon in the past ten years."

"I'll take care of the charge sheets," they heard T.K. tell Joby. "You get back out on patrol. Oh. And bring in their car. It's out Rustin Road about eight miles."

They heard a sigh and a chair squeak. "Okay if I stop off at the store first, TK.? Aunt Lucynell says she wants peaches and sugar for her cobbler. And some fruity wine to put in it."

"To put in *her*, you mean," T.K. said. "Give her some in a soda pop bottle. Here! Take the keys to the Barnhills' car."

They could hear dogs suddenly begin to menace. Their strength and their closeness caused Liz Barnhill to shrink against her husband. John Barnhill thought the dogs sounded very near—perhaps at the back of the service station.

T.K. asked, "Why them dogs acting up?"

"Coons must have come down out of the hills early tonight," Joby said.

"They been fed?"

"Spared the meat, like you said. Probably why they're menacing at the coons. Better take my rain slicker. We got

black clouds moving into the valley. Storm be here before morning, maybe sooner."

"You don't go getting into any long conversations with that old woman," T.K. warned. "We still got us work to do tonight. And we got us some prisoners now."

After Joby left, T.K. escorted them into a cell. One cell was all they had, Liz whispered. Then they heard T.K.'s boots in retreat—and then, a bit later, they heard a typewriter clacking fitfully, as though its operator had not had much practice at it.

"What could you tell about the house?" John whispered.

"A long flight of stairs up the front," Liz told him. "Lights on in the living room. More on in back—probably where the kitchen is."

"Aunt Lucynell making her peach cobbler," surmised John Barnhill.

"John, I don't like the feel of this. The phony speeding charge, this cell, none of it."

John Barnhill nodded grimly. Through the bars, he said in a raised voice, "*Deputy Stringer?* Just where did you say your uncle, the sheriff, was?"

The typing stopped. "Didn't say."

"Well, would it be too much of an inconvenience to say now?"

"Sheriff Springer is over to the state prison. He picks up some extra work there some nights. Guarding on the wall. Be back in the morning. Though I don't expect it'll matter to you two any. I expect you'll be gone before then."

John Barnhill's stomach eased the knot tangled there. He heard Liz sigh softly. That news was encouraging.

"Be gone, of course, *if* you'd leave a deputy alone to do his paperwork."

"Sorry, Deputy Stringer," John Barnhill said.

Deputy Stringer had their wallet and purse. Liz told John he was beginning to check through them now.

"If you could just write up our ticket and let us be on our way," John Barnhill said. "We've still got a lot of driving to do before morning."

"Can't do that just yet," T.K. told them. "Have to make checks back to Ann Arbor. To find out if you folks are who you say you are."

"There are pictures of the two of us *all through* my wallet and my wife's purse," said Barnhill.

"Pictures and the like can be gimmicked up," said T.K. Stringer coolly. "Get it all sorted out in time. You folks just make yourselves comfortable and leave a law officer alone to concentrate on his work."

"What's being done about our car?" Liz asked.

Stringer exploded a heavy breath. "Like you heard, Joby's out bringing it back. Hell, we'll even give it a lube job and put it in time for you. Me and Joby do some auto repairing out back. We charge reasonable and we do good work. We do a lot of work for tourists and visitors just passing through. And we also work on the vehicles they got over to the prison."

"Let us just pay the fine and be on our way," said Barnhill.

"Well, we got us a lot of checking and verifying to do before we swing open that door, folks. Got to check your personal references on your business cards and address books. How do we know you ain't some pair of wanted criminals sneaking off down the back roads from arrest warrants and all of that. We can't be too careful."

"I don't believe any of this," Liz Barnhill whispered under her breath.

"We have money and travelers checks," said John Barnhill.

"No need to worry," T.K. told them. "Everything you got'll be accounted for. Says here you work for an investment firm back there in Ann Arbor. Well now, Mr. Barnhill, just how *does* a fellow do that kind of work when he's as blind as a bat?"

John Barnhill clenched his teeth and his fists. Not altogether civilly, he said, "I work by tapes and braille books and voice quotes."

"We'll check that out, too," said T.K.

They heard a car drive up. A minute later, Joby came back in the jail area from the service station's front office. His slicker glistened.

"Sprinkling out there," he told T.K., shrugging out of his slicker and hanging it on a coatrack not far from the cell. "Going to storm any minute. That change our plans, T.K.?"

"Don't change nothin', Joby. You talk too much. You got their car?"

"Out back. Just like the other times."

SOMETHING INSIDE John Barnhill's mind clicked. *Just like the other times. What other times?*

"Get the old woman her groceries?" said T.K.

"Did that for a fact," Joby said. "She wants to know about all the commotion tonight."

"What'd you tell her?"

"That we was doin' a job of work on a car," Joby said in a tone veiled in mild secrecy and mischief. "Like before."

T.K. again told Joby he talked too much and went back to his typing.

Joby selected a girly magazine and fell into the chair next to the desk. In a minute he stopped turning pages and said to T.K. "Maybe the prisoners are hungry? Could run on up to the house and rustle them up some bacon and eggs."

Liz Barnhill saw T.K. look up from his typing and leer at his brother venomously. "Aren't required to feed prisoners unless they're incarcerated longer than four hours. Go on back out on patrol, Joby. And leave that girly book here when you go. Them pictures don't do you no good but get you all worked up for nothin'. No girls within twenty miles but the Spiveys' kid. You know how old man Spivey keeps her locked up and got more guns around that house of his than they got in the whole U.S. Army."

Crestfallen, Joby got up, put on his wet slicker and left.

Another few minutes dragged by. Then John Barnhill said, "Can we know our bail?"

"Can't quote no bail," said T.K.

"And why not?"

"Because," T.K. said, testily, "bail can't be quoted until I check with other authorities about such things as outstanding traffic warrants and the like."

"Traffic tickets and warrants don't cross state lines," said

John Barnhill, with firm knowledgeability.

"Yeh, and then we also have *the like* to consider," retorted T.K. quickly. "Like felonies. And maybe you got some tickets here in Florida. Lot of things to consider in the quoting and computation of bail."

John Barnhill sighed but said nothing. He knew by now it was frustrating and dangerous to fly into the teeth of T.K.'s testiness with reason and logic.

"Barnhill, Barnhill," T.K. was now heard to repeat under his breath. "Seems to me I maybe saw a name like that on an F.B.I. poster somewhere. Maybe with my records up at the house. Keep all our files and records up to the house. Those of some importance. Got to have document control, you know."

"Keep them in an old Army sock?" said John Barnhill.

Barnhill heard teeth sucking air through them. "Pardon?" said T.K. "I believe I heard you make a cogent comment, Mr. Barnhill?"

John Barnhill swallowed his anger. "No, Deputy Stringer. I didn't say anything important. Nothing *cogent*."

"Well that's just fine. I'm going on up to the house now and make a check of those records. I trust you all will keep to the immediate area, *haha!*"

Several minutes passed before either of them risked words. But when Liz Barnhill finally broke the ice it was with a sledgehammer.

"John, we've got to get away from this place. On our own. Right now."

John Barnhill stayed silent. He was feeling for his cane.

"I've heard of incidents, John," Liz went on. "Embezzlement. I've read of entire families being wiped bankrupt because of it. And I've read about *worse things* happening."

"T.K. made one slip-up when he left me my cane." John Barnhill said. "Maybe he's made others."

"There's a ring of keys over on the wall," said Liz Barnhill, catching sight of them now. "Near T.K.'s desk."

"Will my cane reach them?"

"No, it's too far."

John Barnhill shut his eyes tightly and demanded all that could be given of his mind. "Is there anything the cane could topple?" he said.

"The coat rack!" Liz said suddenly in hope and then deflated just as rapidly. "But the cane won't reach."

"What if I looped my belt around it and we used the belt as a whip."

"Yes!"

Liz gave it three tries. On the fourth, the coat rack crashed to

the floor. "If we use the rack," Liz told her husband, "and we both guide it at its base, it will reach the keys."

"Let's give it a shot," Barnhill said.

It took at least a dozen shots, with Liz guiding the rack's direction as they both strained against its weight. The ring of keys slid down its end at long last.

When Liz had the cell's door open, she ran to the front office to see where T.K. was. John Barnhill waited breathlessly, wonder whether his blindness would be an asset to them or a deadly liability.

"It's raining a torrent, John," Liz said when she came back a minute later. "T.K. is still up at the house. But we don't have much time!"

"Out the back way!" John told her pushing even as she grasped his hand to lead. "Out where Joby left our car!"

Outside, the rain pelted in a merciless onslaught. They took four steps down, then went along a narrow, slippery boardwalk. Liz had found a flashlight in T.K.'s desk and it now became as vital as an ounce of water in the desert.

"You see our car?" John asked her.

"Ahead. About fifty feet. Squat building on our left. Now a chain link fence." John Barn-

hill heard his wife's gasp. "John, the *kennels!* For the dogs!"

"Don't panic. Just keep us moving. The dogs are probably inside in this rain."

"A steep step here," Liz told him, taking a firmer grip on his hand. "John, those dogs..."

"Don't concern yourself about the dogs!" he snapped, almost like a dog himself. "They're *inside*. And the rain is smothering our scent. They can't tell us from friends or strangers. They're caged and they can't harm us."

WHEN THEY ARRIVED at the car, John stood back while Liz went to see if Joby had left the keys in the ignition. They were gone. "What about the spare," John said. "Under the sun visor."

Liz' voice was a tragic whimper. "He found *it*, too."

The car could be wired. It was a simple high-school exercise even a blind man could do. Liz led him over to the hood, where he lifted it and felt around inside. No way. Joby had also taken the distributor.

The dogs were still menacing, but the rain continued to come down in a torrent.

"God, John!" Barnhill heard his wife say, her hand a cold dead man's grip in hers. "Those dogs!"

"Forget the dogs. They can't

harm us. We need a gun. Or a telephone. How far to the house?"

"About a hundred yards," Liz said. "Behind the grocery along a path, then up a hill to the rear of the house."

"What else do you see?"

"A big building here behind the gas station. Probably where T.K. and Joby work on their cars."

"Any other cars?" John said anxiously.

"Scads of them. They're all over."

"Go over and look. Maybe there's one that will run. I'll wait here."

By his braille watch Liz was gone three minutes. When she returned, her voice still contained an element of forlorn emptiness.

"They're just wrecks, John. Just body shells." She gasped suddenly. "John. Someone's just come out onto the front porch of the house!"

"T.K.?"

"I think so. I recognize his lope. He's going down the front stairs to the street. He's coming back this way, back to the jail!"

"If we pass him and make for the house," said John Barnhill, "will he be able to spot us between the buildings?"

"I don't think so. No, it's too dark and too far away."

"Okay, then. We'll go along

the path—to the back door of the house."

The path rose steeply, twisting through brambles and bushes. Twice John Barnhill fell, once wrenching out of his wife's leading grasp, once pulling her hard to the ground with him. In the background, over their shoulders, the dogs were in a wild frenzy. When T.K. entered the jail and found his prisoners gone, he would pack them and begin a search. Or worse, he might simply open the kennel gate after giving them a scent from the wallet or purse, to let them hunt as separate free-hunting killers.

The back stairway of the house was an incredible flight. The planks were semi-rotted. They gave with each step and seemed about to collapse under their combined weight.

Liz saw no one in the kitchen. The light was on. Inside, there was the odor of cooked food and cheap wine and age—plus a sickroom smell, as if the house were a place of infirmity.

"No phone here in the kitchen, John," Liz said. "Just a sack of groceries. The ones Joby brought up from the store."

"Do you remember seeing any telephone poles or lines as we drove into town?" John Barnhill said.

"God, I can't think," Liz told

him. "I'm not much help in this, am I?"

"Get a grip on yourself. You're doing fine."

"John, it was just too dark and we were moving too fast for me to remember if I saw any poles or lines."

"Forget it. If there's a phone in this house, we'll find it."

Liz took his hand again in preparation for a tour of the house, when he felt her hand suddenly jump in his fingers. He heard a new sound, a sound of creaking, of wheels turning and for a moment he could not place it. And then he put the sound together with the sick-room smell. A wheelchair.

"It's the aunt," Liz said, her voice quavering.

"You must be the two young people!" the voice of an old woman greeted them, not at all discourteously. "With the car the boys are working on. T.K. was just up here and said they was a car they had a job of work on."

"Yes, that's our car," John Barnhill heard his wife say. The tension had left her voice and her hand relaxed in his. "We came up to the house to—see if we could use your telephone. We'd like to call ahead to tell the people we're seeing that we'll be delayed."

"No telephones," said the old woman. "I'm Aunt Lucynell and



I guess I been in this chair too long for the comfort and sanity of any human, but I *do know* about telephones. We got no phones here. Got them up to

Lake City and over to Shiner's Hill. But not here."

"My husband is blind and we're on our way to Miami Beach for an operation," Liz told her. "We need a car. We'll bring it back in a few days."

"Only cars here that work," said Aunt Lucynell, "is the boys' cars. That's their business, you know. They repair automobiles. And they're very good at it. Some weeks they do so good, they don't even have to open the grocery, except for our own needs."

"About their cars," John Barnhill said. "You mean, their police cars."

The old woman's voice became snagged in confusion. "Police? No. The cars are just ordinary cars. They bought them last year over to Pine Tree. Paid cash, they did."

"Not cars painted up to look like police patrol cars," pressed John Barnhill.

"No, just ordinary cars."

"When was the last time you saw the cars?"

"Well I guess that would have been just after they bought them. Can't remember seeing them lately. They keep their cars locked up most of the time—to keep them from the hill thieves. I hear them go out nights in them, though. When they go sporting off to Haver, or Pine Tree or Shiner's Hill.

To the dances. I guess two hard-working nephews like T.K. and Joby got a right to go out in their cars after the girls."

"T.K. and Joby," pressed John Barnhill. "What do they wear when they're working?"

"Why, them coveralls," Aunt Lucynell said. "I clean them. Keep them starchy and nice."

In an urgent whisper, Liz said to her husband, "John, they probably put them on over their police uniforms every time they come up to the house."

"Then you know nothing about their police uniforms," said John Barnhill.

"Say, what sort of tricks are you two playing here?" said the old woman, the anger slowly surfacing in her tone.

"The uniforms they wear when they call themselves the Tranquil Police Department," John Barnhill said.

A shot of thunder shook the valley suddenly. The dogs were still menacing.

"The boys got themselves jobs in the law enforcement?" said Aunt Lucynell. "It's something new to me. What did you say they called themselves?"

"Tranquil," said John Barnhill. "This is the town of Tranquil, Florida, isn't it? Population five hundred and eighty-five?"

"Don't have no name here, young man. Just a junction here—always—has been. And the only folks living around here is just me and the boys."

"What about the prison?" said Liz. "The one that's located eight miles over North Blue Ridge?"

"Ain't no prison around here, young woman. Except the state prison all the way over to Tallahassee."

John Barnhill said, "What about a trio of brothers named the Motes? T.K. told us they were tracked by the dogs and caught after a prison break a few years ago."

"No prison and no family name of Motes," said Aunt Lucynell. "Not around here. Not ever."

"John, they made it up," Liz said. "And the signs we saw out on the highway—they're fake! T.K. and Joby put them up!"

"The boys," said John Barnhill, "do they live here? In the house?"

"They got rooms upstairs," the old woman said.

"And their uncle, the sheriff. Sheriff Harley Stringer."

IN THE WOMAN'S VOICE John Barnhill identified a new emotion, a combination of elements—of indignation, of sadness and remorse, of knowing skepticism that she was

being made a fool, or the butt of some cruel joke.

"Young man, I don't like the sound of what you're saying. My husband died six years ago. The boys found him shot dead over by Soap Creek. Dead by gunshots and chewed by dogs. They was wild dogs, the boys told me. Wild dogs all over these hills. Crazy wild dogs nobody will have a thing to do with, dogs with the devil in their souls."

"John, they killed their own uncle," Liz whispered.

"Upstairs," John told her. "Maybe we'll find hunting rifles or pistols in their rooms."

In a sudden move, John Barnhill was pulled by his wife down the hallway. He felt one of the chair's wheels brush his leg, then the old woman shouted after them.

"*Thieves! No, you can't go up there! That's the boys' private property up there. Thieves, thieves, thieves! God's wrath shall strike down the thieves even as they flee, and the things after which they lust shall be sown to cover their bodies as the earth of a robber's grave!*"

John Barnhill could hear the wheels of the chair clacking after them in pursuit, a pursuit that would end when the old woman reached the staircase. Liz pulled him up the flight,

which made a turn halfway up for another ascent in a new direction. His bearings became misplaced and from here on out, more than any other time in his sightless life, it had to be Liz' eyes on which his life depended—his and hers.

"Two rooms," said Liz when they reached the second floor of the house. "One down each wing."

"Which one is in the direction of the service station?"

"The right," Liz told him.

"Take us down that way, then. Maybe there's a window. You might be able to see what's happening down the street."

The door was unlocked. John sensed clutter and filth.

"It's T.K.'s room," Liz said after making a quick trip around it. "I found one of his police uniform name tags on his bureau. 'It's a pig sty. Clothes everywhere, unmade bed, dirty food dishes. . .'"

"Check the bureau drawers for a pistol," John told her.

The search proved fruitless. "There's a locked closet, here, John."

"Locked? Why would anyone lock a closet?"

"I don't know."

"Go back to the bureau-top. See if you can find a loose key someplace."

John Barnhill heard Liz's fingers scrambling over junk.

"A key!" Her voice trembled.

"Try it in the lock!"

"It fits!"

John Barnhill felt the base of the door strike his left foot as it was opened. He waited for Liz to make a response about the closet's contents. But he heard only an unnatural silence.

"Well? What's inside?"

From his wife's throat escaped a whimper of—*what?* Pity? Terror? Shock?

"John, the floor is piled with—wallets! Wallets and purses! Forty, fifty. And ours—they're right here on top!"

Without even looking, they both knew the wallets and purses were empty, stripped clean. Beyond the upstairs room, they could hear the dogs barking at a frenzy-pitch. Someone was stirring them, taking them from their kennels.

John Barnhill could hear Liz stooping to search a little through the wallets and purses now. Her voice, when it next came, seemed to him to be running for a place to hide, running to a place of deep pity and remorse. "John, there are *tiny* purses. And oh God, little wallets with cowboys tooled on them."

"T.K. is letting the dogs out," John said, this new grief seeming for the moment to diminish in the face of the terror of the

hounds. "Go to the window and tell me what you see!"

Liz' footsteps retreated. In a moment she reported, "T.K.'s turned on a floodlight out behind the service station. He's got the dogs around him in a circle. What does that mean?"

"It means he's not letting them run free," John told her. "He's leashing them into a pack."

"What does *that* mean?" Liz repeated.

"It means the dogs won't be able to move any faster than T.K. or any farther than the end of the pack leash."

"If we only had a car!" Liz moaned.

There was some logical imperative that was important to their safety here, some vital progression. John Barnhill let it all drop into place, didn't hurry it, until the vital logic they desperately needed touched home in his brain.

"We *do* have a car," he said. "The *second* patrol car! It's still out there on Rustin Road, where Joby had to leave it to drive *ours* into town! When T.K. sent him back out onto patrol, he had to take T.K.'s car!"

"Leaving T.K. without a car!" said Liz.

"If we follow the path back along the highway, then cut through the woods..."

"And if the path runs out?" Liz said, fearfully.

"Then we'll make our own. Come *on*, Liz! It's our only chance!"

LIZ TOOK HIS HAND again and led him back down the second floor hall. The old woman was at the bottom of the staircase. Her wheelchair was jammed up against the bottom step and she was leering up at them, pointing a twisted finger and screaming, "Whatever you've stolen, you won't get far with it! T.K.'s got the dogs out after you! You won't get far! Those are the killer dogs and T.K. keeps them hungry for a reason!"

"John, the poor woman doesn't know *anything* of what's been happening in this place!" Liz said to John Barnhill, in a whispered shout, close to his ear.

"You needn't lose your eyesight to become blind," John Barnhill said. "Just push her chair back far enough for us to get past."

The woman had the brake set on her wheelchair. She clawed out with both hands as they pushed the cumbersome weight out of their way. John Barnhill felt a fingernail gash his left cheek in the fury of the old woman's screams. With his hand he found the locking lever

on the chair and released it. He could feel his cheek burning and bleeding.

Liz led him out the back door, in the seering wake of the old woman's damnations, then down the long flight of stairs in the rain. The dogs sounded no nearer than before. T.K. was still getting them leashed in the kennel.

Liz found the path that led east. Falling, stumbling, scrambling, they ran with terror their constant companion, with the specter of death just over their shoulders. One mile, two miles, three. John Barnhill tried to measure the distance flying beneath his feet.

*"And bring in their car,"* T.K.'s voice ran across his mind. *"It's out Rustin Road about four miles."*

The rain continued. The sky overhead was coal black, Liz told him. They were moving faster than T.K. and the pack of dogs, but they didn't dare slow their frantic pace. The hillsides and valleys, John knew, could play tricks with sounds.

They went another mile and then swung right, down into a tangle of trees and hillsides and gulleys. If either of them fell now and were seriously injured, T.K.'s dogs would take care of matters. They would die the way the uncle had died and be

buried in anonymous graves no one would ever find. They would simply disappear—as finally and certainly as if the earth had distended its jaws and swallowed them up.

It was twenty minutes more to the highway. The abandoned patrol car was there, parked on the shoulder of the road, five hundred years farther than they had expected.

When he'd driven the Barnhills' car into the service station, Joby had locked the patrol car. And he'd taken the keys. Annoyances but not impasses. With the butt of his cane, John Barnhill smashed in a wing window and then tampered with ignition wires, while Liz fidgeted in terror behind the wheel.

The menace of the dogs grew louder. The volume of space around them seemed to shrink. The sensation made John Barnhill believe it was true what some people said about death, that you began to feel very small just before you died, that volume both within and without began to diminish.

Liz drove and the night around them was a tunnel down which they escaped.

"John?" came her small, hidden voice after they had gone a mile. "The auto shells I saw out behind the service station."

"Try not to think about it,"

he told her. "Try not to think about any of it."

"I *want* to think about it," she said. "I *have* to. Those wrecks. They all had different license plates. Maine and Ohio and California. I looked for Elvira's little green Volvo, but there were so many of them. . ."

"All right, all right! Let's just concentrate on getting away from here."

"Oh, John—her car *could be* one of them," Liz choked on the ragged edge of tears. "She *could be* one of the ones they. . ."

"Liz, we'll get it all sorted out when we reach Tallahassee," said John Barnhill firmly.

In another mile they came upon a flashing red light up the road, a distant beacon flickering in the dark night. They found Joby's patrol cap left in the back seat and Liz put it on and stuffed her dark hair up under it. John Barnhill made a ball of himself down on the seat out of sight.

"Wave to him as you go past," Liz heard John say. "Don't stop and don't look back."

Joby thought it was T.K. behind the wheel. In the rain and the darkness, no one could tell. Liz saw him wave at her and

she waved back. She kept her eyes glued to the roadway. She didn't want to look at him, catch a glimpse of him, anything.

The barking of the dogs fell away and, in a few more miles, faded out completely. The patrol car had plenty of gas. When they passed the house and the grocery and the service station, Liz risked a glance at them. Neither of them spoke of it. Neither of them spoke of anything until they reached the main highway and got miles of straight, flat roadway behind them, as black as a solid wall with no headlights behind.

When they did speak, they talked about essentials—about Tallahassee and mileage and gas enough to make it. One of the things of which they did not speak was the scene they passed on the highway, where Joby had stopped his patrol car.

The car he had stopped had a man and a woman in it. Liz thought she'd seen the head of a small boy also. The unspeakable, unthinkable thing about the scene was, would the police in Tallahassee believe their story and get to Tranquil before the man and the woman and the little boy were murdered?



# COUNTERPOINT

John's plot to murder his uncle looked foolproof—but his rich uncle was no fool.

by

WYC TOOLE

"JOHN BOY, you might as well quit waiting for me to die. More likely, *I'll* bury you!" The man speaking was in his sixties. He had a seamed, brown face that was lean and hard and topped with a full head of silver grey hair. His eyes were dark, hooded by heavy grey eyebrows, and his hands were large and strong, speckled with brown liver spots and covered with grizzled hair. His name was Charles Austin and he was as rich, important and decisive as he looked.

"Charles, you have no reason at all to say a thing like that to me," John Makin protested to his Uncle. "You have been very good to me and I have everything I want."

"No man has *everything* he wants, John. Specially, if what



he's got come easy. And sometimes you get right greedy round the eyes. Worries me a little, 'cause it ain't a lean and hungry look anymore—it's just plain greed."

Charles sipped his brandy and looked straight into his nephew's eyes over the rim of the fat glass. The candlelight turned Charles' eyes the glittering hard grey of dark granite sprinkled with mica, and the piercing stare made John nervous. He coughed and brought his napkin up to his mouth, using the movement as an excuse to break eye contact he could not endure.

"Charles, *what* is the matter with you, tonight? That cornpone dialect mixed with Shakespeare sounds extremely foolish. If you have guilt feelings about refusing me the thirty thousand dollars I asked for yesterday, forget it. The money wasn't that important to me. It was a chance to buy into a very lucrative real estate venture with a high risk clause. I told you that. Nothing certain about it at all.

"I'm merely surprised you denied me the opportunity to make some money on my own. You complain about me not working and then when I try to meet my own financial needs I get no help whatsoever. That's the discouraging thing to me

and I certainly wish you would reconsider the matter."

John ended on an emotional tone in his voice, as he nervously turned a knife in his fingers and shifted his head so that his uncle could not catch and hold his eyes again.

Charles set his glass down and leaned back in his chair. This time his words came clear and precise with no hint of a southern drawl.

"John, the 'cornpone' dialect is a holdover from a time when I was rising in the world and it was better not to appear *too* perceptive. It's an old habit that reasserts itself under certain circumstances. This is one of them, and I believe it would be better to clear the air between us.

"I may seem old in your eyes, but I am not senile. And, I see no reason for you to treat me as if I am. I have accepted your—shall we call them—'business fantasies' over the years because it salved both our feelings when money changed hands. I have never had any desire to place you in the position of begging—but there is a *limit* to what I will accept. A very unsavory man, who said you owed him twenty-five thousand—not thirty—came to see me today."

John's square head snapped up and his eyes narrowed. The

tip of his tongue licked nervously at his full lips and he smoothed his thinning blond hair tight against his head with a quick movement of his right hand. For a moment, the gestures combined to give him the appearance of a hostile snake.

Charles ignored the sharp reaction and cut off any immediate reply by continuing smoothly, "I wouldn't pay him. I told him to sue us!"

Charles paused and sipped his brandy. "You know, we are almost classic, John. They write a lot of books about people like us. The rich uncle with no family but a nephew. And, the nephew waiting eagerly for him to die. The books are usually about murder, John—because men are impatient animals. And young men are the most impatient of all. So, *be careful*."

"If you want my money—try to outlive me. I have put up with a great deal from you because of your late mother. I loved my sister dearly and so I tolerate you. But don't force it! You are making me nervous and if I catch you at anything foolish again, out you go. That is neither a threat nor a warning. It is a simple statement of fact."

Charles stood up and started out of the room. At the door he stopped, turned and smiled, "No hard feelings, John. I have been

aware of your weaknesses for a good many years. I merely felt it was time to clarify our positions, and establish some additional rules that will enable us both to survive. Good night."

As the sound of Charles' footsteps faded, the butler came quietly into the dining room and began to clear the table.

"Dammit, Henry!" - John snapped viciously. "Just because Mr. Charles leaves the room, the meal is not finished! Now you just stand over there and I'll let you know when I want something!"

Without a word the small, thin man moved to the wall and assumed a posture of watchful waiting. His pale face displayed no emotion, but his hands trembled with suppressed frustration. John drummed his fingers irritably on the table at this patient acceptance of his rudeness and decided to enjoy his inherited authority a bit more.

"This coffee is stone cold, Henry!" he said in a sneering tone. "I know you're old and slow, fella, but keeping the coffee hot shouldn't be too difficult—even for you. So throw out this and get me some that's fit to drink! Think you can handle that?"

In the dim candlelight, it was hard to see Henry's jaw tighten, but it did. The corners of his

mouth twitched as if he was going to speak. Then, thinking better of his impulse, he moved quietly to the table and picked up the cup that had been pushed roughly towards him. It rattled in the saucer as he limped towards the kitchen. Some days his knee hurt worse than others.

John got up from the table and watched the door close softly behind the old man. *Old fool!* he thought. *When he gets back, I'll tell him I changed my mind. He can get me some tea.*

The idea gave him pleasure and he smiled momentarily as he crossed to the window. The frown returned to his sharp face as he stood looking out over the Virginia countryside toward the river. It had been a bad day and he realized the great cost of his recent mistake. However, he had to get twenty-five thousand dollars . . . and soon. The people he owed would not wait much longer.

On the Potomac, the lights of the passing boats blended with the fireflies flashing above the broad lawn that sloped to the water. Vague black outlines of huge oak trees blotted out parts of the dark river, confusing the eyes and distorting distances. The reflections of candles on old silver flickered in the small panes of the French doors that

lead onto a vast flagstone patio, and the underwater lights in the swimming pool split the black expanse of garden with an unexpected square of green brilliance.

It was a place for parties and pleasure and power—and only one man stood in the way of it all being his. How closely, he thought, Charles had articulated his mood. He was becoming *very* impatient.

At that moment, Henry returned with the coffee and John did his "tea" routine. Henry's only reaction was to clench his jaw tighter. John smiled at the old man's frustration and discomfort as he returned to the kitchen.

Henry was John's one claim to authority and he abused the privilege with much pleasure. The old man had arrived on the estate five years ago like a shipwrecked sailor. Small and thin, with watery blue eyes, a big nose and a bald spot centered directly in the middle of his head, the unimposing little man had no possessions, no references and no known history.

That he did have education and training soon became apparent and Charles placed the running of the house more and more in his hands. Henry seldom spoke, never complained and never left the grounds surrounding the house. It was as if

he were resting or, more probably, hiding from some past disaster.

John quickly learned that Henry admired his uncle, loved his job and wanted to stay on the estate for the rest of his life. He used this knowledge as a weapon against the old man, deviling him at every opportunity and embarrassing him whenever possible.

He was careful never to do so in the presence of his Uncle, however, for he was well aware his power to treat Henry in this manner came from his position of inheritance . . . that Henry accepted his rudeness only because he would one day own the place—and because, above all else, Henry wanted to stay. John was not certain whether his greatest pleasure would come in the future from keeping Henry on to humiliate him or from throwing him out.

After a short interval, Henry returned with a pot of hot tea and a clean cup. John looked at it distastefully and said, "Well, Henry, you managed to fool around so long, I no longer want anything. Trouble is, you're spoiled. My uncle is too easy to please. You're going to have to really shape up when you work for *me*—right, fella!"

There was no immediate answer and John persisted. "Right?"

"Yes, Mr. John: I certainly will," Henry replied.

"Good! Good! Henry, you start working on it," said John jovially as he left the room and headed upstairs to his bedroom.

Sometime, just before dawn, when the night blacks were turning to hazy greys, John sat straight up in bed, wide awake, knowing what he had to do. Perhaps it was the vague outline of a dream he had just had, or the press of the money—whatever, he was ready. The time had come for an accident, one that would solve all his problems. What could be easier in this house?

There was a gun case in the den with two shotguns and four rifles in it that all needed cleaning. Unloaded guns went off everyday when they were being cleaned. If such a thing happened when his Uncle was standing in the way, it might be messy—but nothing could be proved.

John took a flashlight, got out of bed and went to the den. He opened the gun case, took out a double barreled shotgun, broke it, inserted two shells, then put it back in place. He returned to his room, set his alarm clock, and fell asleep immediately with a peaceful mind and a smile on his face.

The entire process—from inception to completion—had

taken less than fifteen minutes. John had been so absorbed in his own actions that he never saw the grey figure standing quietly against the wall in the hallway, watching his every move.

The next morning, when his uncle walked into the den, John was already busy rubbing the long barrel of the shotgun with an oily rag. "Well, it's good to see you doing something useful, John," Charles said, crossing over to the gun cabinet and taking out the other shotgun. "I'll help you."

"No need to, Charles. I can do them," John replied. Just then, Henry appeared in the door of the den with cups and a pitcher on a silver tray and offered, "Coffee, gentleman?"

"Yes, put it over there," John said quickly, pointing to the desk. As usual, Henry had picked a bad moment. It was difficult to put a finger on anything precise, but John felt that Henry was playing the role of a butler as it might be done in a Broadway production.

For a brief moment, John wondered if he should wait until Henry left. Then he decided it would be better to have a witness. With that decision made, he carelessly placed the gun across his lap with the barrels pointing towards Charles and pulled back both hammers.

At the sound of the two crisp clicks, Charles lifted his head and said crisply, "*Watch that gun!*"

"Why?" John asked, "It's not loaded. See." He pulled both triggers and braced himself for the shock. Instead of two shattering blasts, however, there was only the hollow double snaps of two hammers falling on empty chambers.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Charles said in wonder. "Henry said you'd do it, but I never thought you had the guts."

John's throat was dry and tight, "I really don't know what you mean," he said weakly.

"Where did you put the shells you took out of that gun, Henry?" Charles asked.

"In the gun you're holding now, sir," Henry replied impersonally.

"Good! Well, John, about all I can say is, 'I warned you'." Charles pulled the triggers and hit John chest-high with both charges.

For a full minute, the blasts deafened them and the smell of powder hung acrid in the air. Charles shook his head at the mess he had made and said, "Terrible things, guns. Never can trust them."

"No, sir," Henry replied. "They are most treacherous. However, you must not blame yourself too harshly, sir. Acci-

dents happen every day. Would you care for a bit of brandy with your coffee?" Henry handed Charles a cup of coffee with no cream.

"No. This will be fine. I'm going into the living room and wait for the police. Will you please make the proper calls, Henry?"

"Certainly, sir. I'll take care of everything. You go rest a minute. It's been a shattering morning for you."

"But not as 'shattering' as it

would have been without your warning." Charles nodded appreciatively. He started for the door, then paused and said quizzically, "The only thing I do not clearly understand, Henry, is *why* you involved yourself in this distasteful business. Why you are helping me commit murder?"

Henry looked up in surprise, "That's simple enough, Mr. Charles," he replied. "No man wants to lose a good job these days."



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MIKE SHAYNE Presents

Next Month's Short Stories

### **RUBOUT**

by EDWARD WELLEN

### **BLIND MAN'S BLUFF**

by JOHN F. DOBBYN

### **PAINTED IN CRIMSON**

by PAULINE C. SMITH

---

# HOPE

# CHEST

by  
TALMAGE  
POWELL



*The little old lady enjoyed her foretaste of death—and could not wait to taste it again.*

THE LITTLE OLD LADY was a faint flickering in empty spaces where all the stars had gone out, a pinprick of awareness in a timeless nothingness. She was a single spark struggling

against the darkness, a wavering candle glow, reaching, searching, writhing higher, bursting at last in a shower of purple, green and gold sparks. The display winked out, spark

by spark, leaving the old lady with the vague and troubled notion that she existed.

She didn't know, in those first moments, who she was, where she had come from, how she had got here. But it didn't seem to matter. She wasn't hot or cold. She was comfortable, and comfort was a state to cherish.

She tried to swaddle herself in the darkness, but returning awareness hung on, gathering strength, spreading like the coming a dreary gray dawn. Her brittle old bones, marrowed with creaks and stiffness, took shape bit by bit. Wan light filtered weakly through her open, filmed eyes, a gray seepage, dirty fog.

She realized that she had a body. She was a physical being, a person. She didn't know yet who the person was. What is a person? She wasn't quite sure of that, either. Person. Individual. A body. A mind.

Her mind. . . Little needles of light dashed in and out of the darkness, stabbing at her with impressions that were disjointed and long buried. The glimpse of a lake off beyond green trees from the dizzying heights of her father's strong shoulders. The hint of lavender in her grandmother's bedroom. The rustle of silk in her first party dress. The quiet of a

cemetery. A headstone with rain washing over the letters of a carved name. Familiar name. Yes. Her husband's name. And the old lady's comprehension of self-identity began to slip together like the fitting of bits and pieces of a smashed china vase.

Like a pupa struggling out of its cocoon, the old lady's senses sagged with exhaustion. She rested, disembodied, formless, cushioned by the blackness. Then the invisible cord began to draw the parts together once more, and a little of the fog washed away from the mirror of memory. A hazy image formed in the gray mists. It was the young girl, the stranger.

She was turning to look at the old lady with startled eyes in her suddenly white face. A soundless conversation took place, very briefly, and the strange girl was fighting to brush the old lady aside, grabbing from the bedside table the ceramic lamp with the heavy bronze base, lifting the lamp and striking. And the old lady heard the echo of her own skull breaking, driving splinters into the brain. . .

The little old lady was an awkwardly arranged collection of fine bones and sinewy flesh, clothed in cool white dress and sandals, on the thick carpeting

of a large bedroom, *her* bedroom. In years past she'd been one of those petite, glowing women who could flash about a tennis court or manage a small sailboat through a sudden squall. Despite her years, there was still a ghost of the old loveliness in the firmly cut little face—but not about the head with its finely textured silver hair.

Her face was turned slightly toward the nearby wall, and slanting light from the windows in the furthest part of the room touched the sunken spot above the little old woman's left ear, the pulpy softness where the touch of fingertips would have detected the grating of broken bone. There was no blood. Had it not been for the scooped-out look of the head, the wide, unseeing eyes and the mouth frozen in a twist of agony, the little old lady might have been sleeping.

It was an incongruous room, a spacious air-conditioned chamber in a modern condominium near Naples, Florida. Its designer had envisioned furnishings moderne, with perhaps a touch of cubist art to relieve the expanse of the east wall. But the old lady had filled it with furnishings precious to her. Big four poster she and her husband had shared in long-ago New England. Heavy walnut

bedside tables, chest on chest and bureau to match the bed. Portraits of a pair of forebears in large oval frames on the wall.

About eight feet from where the little old lady lay, the huge cedar hope chest sat, its lid ornately carved in a design of leaves and flowers. It had been her grandmother's, her mother's and, in due time, hers. A young girl of each generation had patiently and painstakingly filled the hope chest with laces, linens, fine needlework toward the proud day of her marriage.

A shadow fell across the old lady, a fuzzy-edged silhouette of a girl. She was young, in her late twenties, a carelessly sensual figure in knit-top, raveled-edge denim shorts, and scuffed strap sandals. Dark blonde hair was tied with a ribbon away from her face, falling to a ragged ending almost in the small of her back. Her features were small, sharp, but pretty so long as the bloom of youth held.

As she looked at the old woman, she lifted her hand and wiped fine beads of perspiration from under her eyes.

"How can you stand there and look at her?" the man said. He was sitting, humped on the edge of the bed, hands hanging like leaden weights between his

knees, a look of sick shock on his narrow, almost effeminate face. His voice was thick with helpless fright and remorse, as if he'd been kicked in the gut, hard, and choked on every word that came out.

The girl walked backward away from the old lady and came around to face the man. He was dressed in a conservative blue suit, white shirt, black tie, the way the old lady had requested him to dress. His name was Hert Everly and he'd worked for the old woman for five years as chauffeur and general man-servant. It was an excellent job, paying well, with quarters here in the apartment and a lot of time off. The old lady had liked to do things for herself, even to most of the cooking when guests weren't scheduled.

He lifted his face and looked at the girl, the left corner of his mouth twitching, oozing a thin smear of spit. He put his fingers against the tic as if he would mash it out of the flesh. His features twisted a little out of shape, and for a moment he was on the verge of rocking sobs.

"Get hold of yourself, Hertie!" the girl said.

"How could you do it, Carol?" He looked her up and down. His face filled with loathing for her and himself. What had he ever seen in her? She was

sleazy, common, coarse. Even the animal magnetism wouldn't last long. The signs were already there, the broad splayed toes in the crummy sandals, the faint thickness of bone in the ankles, the slight bow in the tapering young legs, the hint of bovine broadness in the hips. One day, before many years had passed, she'd have the allure of a bowling pin capped with brassy hair and a face hardened like cement.

His face mirrored his depth of feeling, and her lips thinned. "You got something on your mind besides the thoughts of a dirty old man chasing a young girl?"

He looked away, a faint murmur, moan-like on his trembling lips. He was forty-ish. Old? Right now he felt too old to die. He heard her suck in a breath. He knew the signs. She had a temper like an undisciplined infant. "Carol, please. . ."

"You thought I was real cool the night you picked me up in the bar," she said, gathering words, venom. "Afterwards, how about afterwards. . . lovesick old creep. Always knocking at my door. Making with the flowers and candy. Smooth talker, you! Going to do great things for me. Now look at the mess you've got me into!"

"I?" he said. A soft, mild

laugh came from him. "I? You were supposed to stay in my quarters, out of sight, any time I brought you here. But today, when I come back to the apartment, what do I hear? What do I see? I hear you in here, in her bedroom. I hear words between you. And a blow. And the sound of her striking the floor. And I rush in—and she is lying there"—a shiver crossed his shoulders—"just as she is now. A hole knocked in her skull. You standing over her with the lamp in your hand."

He began to giggle. "What brought you in here, Carol? Brattish curiosity? Or were you looking for something to pilfer that she might not miss?"

HIS WORDS WERE a dash of cold water on her temper. They rebuilt the bugged-out scene in Carol's mind. She'd got bored in Hertie's bed-sitting room, nothing on TV that was interesting, nothing to do while she waited for him. She knew the old lady was out and that the cleaning maid wouldn't come in until later. Being alone in the apartment, she'd felt the prod of temptation.

Twice before she'd sneaked out things that wouldn't be noticed right away, that could be accounted as lost. A diamond-studded watch the old

lady hadn't worn in a long time, lying carelessly in a drawer. A pair of silver candleholders gathering dust on the back of a shelf in the storage closet.

Never enough to arouse suspicion. Trinkets—junk, the way the rich old lady would look at it. Like, it wasn't really stealing, just taking crumbs the old woman would never miss in a thousand years.

Today, Carol had seen a pearl brooch in a velvet tray on the bureau. She'd picked it up, stood looking at it and turning it in her hands, judging the risks of taking it.

"How dare you!" the old lady's voice had sounded almost in Carol's ear. Caught up in the thought of the brooch, Carol hadn't heard her come in. "Who are you? What are you *doing* in here?"

Furious, outraged, the old woman had been swept past fear. Her hand had moved to seize the brooch. "The nerve! The very intolerable idea of coming in here like this!"

"Let me go!"

"I'll have the police to you. I. . ." The angry voice broke. The old lady had glimpsed the irrational panic in the young, coarsely pretty face. And then the old head had exploded. . .

Carol slowly and carefully forced the scene from her mind.

She hardened herself against remorse.

"Hertie," she said in a sudden change of tone, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean what I did to her or what I just said to you. I'm half out of my mind, that's all." Her eyes filled with convincing tears.

He lifted a hollow gaze. "Are you sure she's dead?"

"Nobody could live with a hole in the head like that. If she isn't dead already, she'd be dead before we could do anything. What's done is done, Hertie. We can't turn it back."

"We must call someone," he said. "An ambulance—the police." But he didn't make any move to get up. His words were rote, vacant, words that he felt should be said. And she knew that he had no more wish to face the police than she did. She wasn't the only one with sticky fingers. She knew that he'd been helping himself on a petty scale for a long time, padding bills the old lady had gradually come to depend on him to pay, juggling accounts as he'd blandly wormed his way further into her service.

She slipped down beside him, holding her temper even though he flinched away.

"I won't want this to be the end of the line for us," she said. "I do love you, Hertie. I got this crazy temper and I know I'm

not good enough for you, but love happens that way sometimes."

She sensed the conflicts straining within him. He was sick with fright for himself but had no capacity to grieve for others. He could care less for the old lady as a person, caring only that her death was a promise of disaster. He knew what he should do in the situation, but he lacked the nerve to do so.

"Hertie," she said. "It's done and over, like I said. If we went to prison and suffered, it wouldn't bring her back. The only thing we can do now is make what we can for ourselves out of this awful happening."

"It's too late, Carol. Everything is ruined!" He reminded her of a trapped rabbit quivering for a way out.

"We have to keep our nerve, Hertie. That's the main thing. No one knows but us what has happened. We can do a lot before anybody finds out—and by that time we'll be long ago and far away, under different names, living the beautiful life."

"You must be crazy!"

"Crazy for life—crazy for what we can get out of this. You don't know opportunity when it hits you in the face."

"Opportunity!" the echo of the word gagged him slightly.

She made a small movement, gripping his bicep. "Just listen to me, Hertie. There's a small fortune in silver, jewels, expensive bits of art right here in the apartment. A Cadillac and Mercedes outside. I know places where we can sell off the stuff fast, no questions asked."

She paused, but he didn't break the short silence, and she knew his mind was sniffing, nibbling, pawing at the prospect she'd raised.

"Her goods on hand is for starters, Hertie. Every fancy store in town knows her boy Friday, which is you, does a lot of shopping for her. We'll hit them all, loading every one of her charge accounts with more goods, mountains of goods."

He was still fooling around with the bait, but his panic was losing its first slashing edge. He was breathing almost evenly.

"There's her bank account for whipped cream on the pie," Carol said. "Can't do her any good now. Might as well benefit somebody—like us."

"You're talking about a forged check?"

"Why not? Must be plenty of papers around the apartment you could trace her signature from. Little old forgery charge ain't much, compared to the charges already hanging over our heads. You cash checks for



her all the time. Everybody at the bank knows you."

"Not checks big enough to dent her account."

"And we sure want to make a nice big dent, Hertie. So we play it cool. You don't go floating into the bank with a check that's got a long string of zeros after the first number on it. Instead, you make a phone call. You instruct the bank that she wants the boodle delivered here by bank messenger and that her check will be waiting. Nothing about that to raise questions. When the messenger gets here with the sackful of beautiful bread, you trade him the check for it."

"He'll want a receipt," Everly said.

"Natch. I'm not so dense I don't know he'll want a receipt. You invite him into the living room, excuse yourself, carry the receipt into another room—where we'll trace her signature on it just like we'll do on the check. When you start back to the living room, I say something after you, so the messenger will hear a woman's voice in the apartment. Not loud. Just enough so he'll know you're not alone. I'll say..." Carol's brow crimped in thought over the line. "I'll say, 'Thank that sweet boy for me, Hertie'."

"That's not what she would... would have... say at all. She didn't talk like that. She'd have said, 'Tell the gentleman from the bank to have a nice day'. And she didn't call me Hertie. Everly—that's what she called me."

"Okay, Everly. How do you like the idea of being rich. And free. Living the good life."

His eyes shone for an instant with the way he liked the idea. Then his shoulders twitched. "It won't work."

"And why not? It'll be days before the unpaid charge accounts and forged check start drawing attention."

"You're assuming that we have time, Carol. And we haven't. We still have..." He tried to look at the spindly old body oc-

cupying the room with them, a few short paces away. His eyes failed. He took a breath. "We still have her. She's real—visible. People come and go. In fact—" he looked at his watch, and his mouth became a red gash. "—I'd forgotten. So much happening I didn't remember."

He jumped up, looking toward the bedroom doorway.

"Remember what, Hertie?"

"The maid—due, Overdue. She has her key. She'll be walking in any minute."

She sprang up beside him, grabbed his arms in both her hands. "Stop it, Hertie! Only chickens get their heads cut off in this world. So the maid is coming. All we got to do is hide the body. Hide it good. Hide it so we'll have two, three, four days. More time than we need."

"Hide it where—under the bed? Sorry." He croaked a laugh, "But the maid vacuums under the bed."

"Hide it..." Carol's eyes swept the room, passed over the ornate cedar hope chest, stopped, darted back.

A tremor of relief shook Carol. "It's made to order, Hertie. That old chest."

"Her hope chest," Everly said. "Somehow it seems wrong."

"It's all the way right—plain perfect, if you ask me. She'll fit in perfectly with a little folding

here and there. Even day maids don't go around opening every chest. The little dead bird will nest in there for days without anybody knowing."

He trembled, and reached for the bedpost for support. "I can't touch a dead body, Carol. Can't drag it over. Can't stuff it in the hope chest."

She grabbed his shoulders, turned him, propelled him toward the doorway.

"Then get out there and be ready for the maid. *Stall* her. Three or four minutes is all I'll need. I'll do it myself, Hertie, and see you in your rooms. Then, when the maid is gone, we'll get started on the rest of it."

"Carol. . ."

"Don't talk, Hertie. Not now. There isn't any choice left. Just do as I say."

IN THE OLD LADY'S consciousness, their voices came and went like the rustle of weak surf on a dark, sandy shore. She struggled to break through the veiling paralysis. Her arms and legs were useless dangling appendages. The wan, gray fog remained smeared through her eyes.

The murmurings slipped in and out like the hissings and raspings of vibrations through a faulty telephone. The girl's voice was the clearer of the

two. The other, lower in pitch, perhaps belonged to a man. Everly? She wasn't sure where the name came from. Who was Everly? Someone she knew. Someone who knew the girl. Everly lived here. Everly was her employee. He had a girl friend in his quarters. Everly was breaking the rules. Everly's voice rose and broke, saying something about her hope chest.

Her tenuous awareness sagged, fatigued with the effort of identifying and placing Everly. She struggled to stay afloat in the dragging cross currents of a syrupy twilight. She was being borne slowly by the swirling tide. Being moved. Dragged along the carpet. Dropped for a moment.

A little mouse came and squeaked. No, it wasn't a mouse. It was the sound of hinges on a warped door. An old warped lid. Everly had talked about her hope chest. Now it was being opened.

For what reason? It contained nothing.

Like quicksand, the thin whey was sucking her along once more. It was suddenly rougher on the surface with corrugated waves. She was rising above the soupy mass, and it was dropping from her in thick globs.

Her mind gathered the fragments of sensation and trans-

lated them into an experience. And she knew the truth. When the lid fell with a thud, she realized she was in her hope chest. Shut away—hidden. The final tenacious hope of being found before it was too late vanished in the rushing darkness. She was falling, falling, reaching with hands that had no touch, screaming as she tumbled end over end with a voice that had no sound.

She fell nightmarishly until she faded to nothingness. The darkness grew calm. A faint rosy glow spilled across the further horizon. The darkness receded. The golden light grew stronger. All the bonds loosened about her. She rose up, and the years had vanished. It was her nineteenth birthday, and she had never felt so vital and alive. She was the loveliest of images with the golden glow all about her.

She heard music, the gay strains of a Straus waltz. A scene spread before her. She was on a lovely terrace in a night warmed by the delicious breath of summer. The golden light came from Japanese lanterns hung over the fragrant lawns and flower gardens.

Voice were all about her, laughter mingled with the music. Girls in party dresses and handsome young men, so straight, tall and vigorous in

white jackets. They crowded about her on this, the occasion of her birthday. She was enveloped in friendships, gay chatter, hugs, quick little kisses, happy jokes.

"Nineteen? And just yesterday I was pulling your pigtails" . . . "Darling, you are growing older" . . . "Better live it up, next year you'll be an old twenty" . . . "The teens are gone but not forgotten" . . . "Now! Look at what nineteen years have done to that knobby-kneed kid. . ."

There was a buffet set up on the end of the terrace with snowy linen and mountains of food. Through a rift in the crowd of people about her, she saw him over there, talking with her father. He glanced in her direction. Their eyes met, held, and he excused himself from her father's presence. He came toward her, brushing by people as if only she existed.

He was standing before her, dark-haired, craggy-faced, broad in the shoulders. He took her hand and took her away. His arm encircled her and he led her into the waltz. On and on they danced while the music poured forth, and she closed her eyes, wondering if she could bear the joy of it all. . .

With her busy beehive mind buzzing about problems of her own, Mrs. Daugherty, the maid, entered the apartment and

drew up with a gasp. Mr. Everly was standing in the middle of the room, looking very strange. His every muscle seemed pulled tight—his face was absolutely bloodless, oozing a clammy kind of sweat even though the air-conditioning was going full blast.

Mrs. Daugherty had never cared very much for him. He was too smooth, too haughty. She was proud of her ability to take note of little things and arrive at conclusions. She was certain that most other people weren't quite as sharp. She could look at ashtrays and dirty dishes and tell what kind of gathering had been here the night before. A grocery order would suggest who was coming to dinner tonight. Mrs. Daugherty's employer was a real lady, who made a point of serving a favored food to a guest.

This Everly, Mrs. Daughterty suspected, had two faces.

"My goodness, Mr. Everly, you gave me a start! Aren't you feeling well?"

"Certainly, I'm well! We have a tight schedule today. So do what you have to and get through your chores quickly."

With raised brows, Mrs. Daughterty watched him wheel and leave the room. She heard small noises of his passage and a heavy silence as he retreated

to the privacy of his quarters.

Lips thinned, Mrs. Daugherty set her handbag beside the nearest living room chair. She was a spare sallow figure with a sharply featured face and thin graying hair bunned at the nape.

She murmured an opinion of Everly under her breath. Clearly, he didn't want her around today, whatever the reason. And nuts to him, too. Mrs. Daugherty had no intention of skimping her work. "I always say," she remarked to no one, "that a thing is worth doing right, if it's worth doing at all."

Might as well start with the master bedroom. Mrs. Daugherty marched down the hallway, opened the linen closet and took out sheets, pillow cases, bedspread, towels and wash cloths.

Carrying the linens in a neat stack on her right forearm, she entered the bedroom. She placed the linens carefully on the bureau and went around the room, checking for dust with fingertips, picking up a pair of stockings, inserting a book marker and closing a book on the bedside table.

The brisk efficiency of her movements faltered, came to a halt. She stood at the foot of the bed, her hand idly resting against a post. Something not

entirely ordinary had caught her eye and she couldn't decide what it was.

Her quick, gimlet eyes probed all about the room with their insatiable curiosity. Everything seemed the same, no tilted pictures that needed straightening, no spills from a late-night glass of warm milk.

"Aha!" Mrs. Daugherty said. She moved from the bed a short distance and examined the way the light was striking the thick carpet. Two parallel lines had been impressed in the plush surface. They were about fifteen inches apart. They were exactly the kind of marking that would have been left if someone had tilted a heavy chair and dragged it across the room.

The maid's portion of her mind decided that she'd have to brush up the nap. Couldn't leave it like that. But that other portion of her thinking processes wanted an explanation. Nothing had been dragged from the room. Instead, the markings in the carpet pile ran away from the door. Around the bed. They ran right to that old hope chest.

"Now what in the world..." Mrs. Daugherty murmured. She stopped beside the hope chest, her eyes once more searching out the markings. They were almost invisible, the way the

light was striking them now.

She knew the chest was empty, an old relic, a cherished part of her employer's youth. Therefore, something large and rather heavy had been dragged to the chest and put inside. Mrs. Daugherty couldn't imagine for the life of her what it could be.

So she lifted the lid.

She choked back her scream, thinking suddenly of Everly's strangeness today. Now she knew the meaning of the impressions in the carpet pile... the little old lady's heel marks, imprinted when her body was hoisted by the shoulders and dragged to the hope chest.

Commanding herself not to faint, Mrs. Daugherty tiptoed to the phone.

FOUR HOURS LATER, Dr. William Wilford and his assistant, Dr. Elizabeth Crown, came out of emergency surgery together, stripping off surgical gloves and dropping white masks to dangle at their necks.

Neither spoke for a moment, feeling the first pull of exhaustion from what they had just been through.

Dr. Crown lifted a hand to peel off her cap, revealing a lustrous feathery cut of rich brown hair touched with skeins of gray.

"Nice job, Bill. Beautiful job! I think she'll make it."

"I know she will," Dr. Wilford said. "I've got that certain feeling. She's one of those spindly old sparrows with the constitution of a mule. And after all, we've patched up heads in worse condition than that one."

"A few. Not many. She certainly looked dead when she was brought in. If the maid hadn't found her when she did, we couldn't have saved her."

"But the maid did, Lizzy. And we did."

The old lady remained in intensive care for eight days. Then she was moved to a private room and there were four weeks of returning strength, of solid food, of therapy in whirlpool baths, of rising from a wheelchair, of longer walks and exercises.

She learned that Everly and the girl had escaped from Florida. She read of their capture in New Orleans where, desperate for money, Carol had egged Everly into an abortive liquor store stickup.

An excellent agency, jealous of its prime reputation, at last sent over three applicants for the old lady to interview. She chose Mrs. Hardesty to take Everly's place. She was middle aged, with a strong frame of central European heritage somewhere in her genes. She

was quietly pleasant company, dependable, the kind the old lady decided she could get on well with. She had been in domestic service for fifteen years, since the death of her husband. Her previous employers had moved to the cold of Canada, offering Mrs. Hardesty the chance to continue with them.

"I'm glad you preferred the warmth of Florida," the little old lady said the day she and Mrs. Hardesty returned to the condominium.

She showed Mrs. Hardesty through the apartment, and within the hour they were smoothly settled in, Mrs. Hardesty back in her own quarters, the old lady sitting stiffly on the edge of a chair in the living room, as if aware of the silence and sudden emptiness of this place where it had all happened.

She got up slowly and slipped without a whisper of a sound into her own bedroom. She stood very still, holding the edge of the door. Then she closed and moved with gossamer lightness across the room.

She sank to her knees beside the hope chest. A breath trembled on her lips. She moved her hand to stroke the ornate carving of the lid lovingly. Once it had fitted snugly. Now, like

herself, it was warped and old, a relic of the past. Lucky that the warpage in the lid let a little air in. Otherwise, she might have smothered.

She lifted the lid and looked at the cedar-lined depths of the chest. A smile stole across her lips. A thrill of anticipation raced through her.

In a series of graceful movements, the little old lady rose, stepped inside the chest, sank down, arranged herself like an infant wriggling to comfort in its crib. Then she slowly lowered the lid on herself with her extended arm, watching while the light disappeared. The darkness inside the chest touched her nostrils with the faint fragrance of old cedar.

She closed her eyes and waited, eager hope pulsing through her. Would it work? Could the lovely miracle happen a second time? Did she

have to have a break in the head for it to happen?

Then it began happening. A rosy light spilled from the further horizon. The light grew in strength until it was all about her. She was nineteen, the center of attention at a gay party. An orchestra was playing a Straus Waltz, and there *he* was, hurrying toward her as if none of the other vital and happy people existed. He was standing beside her, dark-haired, craggy-faced, broad in the shoulders. His eyes were worshipping her, and her whole being felt like a flower. Life was flawless, just beginning, without end.

He was taking her hand. The strength of his arm encircled her waist. He led her into the Waltz, and she closed her eyes, surrendering to the joy of it all.

On and on they danced, in a waltz that would never cease...

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*Watch for These Exciting New Stories:*

**RUBOUT by EDWARD WELLEN**

**PAINTED IN CRIMSON by PAULINE C. SMITH**

**BLIND MAN'S BLUFF by JOHN F. DOBBYN**

**McIVER'S FANCY by CARL JACOBI**

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AUGUST, 1976

# HATE-IN- THE-MIST

*Foxy was playing a foxy game, but he didn't plan on meeting as astute a man as Superintendent McKeever.*

by

HERBERT HARRIS



CHOKING YELLOW FOG still blanketed the docks at Saltnouth, which lay still and deserted when I got there on that winter afternoon.

Tied-up ships, dockside cranes and transit sheds made sinister shadowy outlines in the pale glow from electric lamps.

A lone official smiled and waved as I made my way through the customs-shed to a staircase at the other end of the long concrete building.

He knew me well. As a reporter on the *Saltnouth Times*, I made a weekly visit to the customs building to talk to the rugged keen-faced man who occupied an office above it—a room whose files packed enough drama to keep a thriller writer happy for years.

"Come in!" boomed Superintendent Keever as I rapped on his glass-panelled door.

His lean weatherbeaten face creased into a grin when he

saw me. For some reason or other he liked me. I had never failed to get a good story from him.

The man whose operations-area covered the busy docks and the whole Saltmouth waterfront pointed the stem of his pipe towards the window. "Think this fog will go on much longer? Shipping's at a standstill."

"I don't know, Super," I said. "My paper is saying it's Saltmouth's worst fog for years. There's a ship anchored out there—a Dutchman—that refuses to move an inch till the fog clears."

Keever grimaced. "You telling me?"

"Sorry!" I swallowed. "I was forgetting you know everything that goes on around here."

He smiled, shaking his head. "Not everything. For example, there's a dockside character named Foxy due to blow in at any minute. He rang from a call-box and said he had some information for me. I ought to have an inkling what it's about, but I'm blessed if I do."

"Foxy?" I frowned. "What's his real name?"

Keever sucked thoughtfully at his pipe. "Nobody's sure what his real name is. He's just known round the docks as Foxy. Maybe because he's wizened and crafty looking. Ac-

tually he's been useful to us off and on."

"Oh, a nark."

"That's it. And crooked as they make 'em, I daresay. But it's difficult to fasten any charges on blokes like Foxy. He's one of the dockside layabouts who never seem to do a job of work, but you can bet they're up to something shady. We just watch and wait, hoping that the little fish will lead us to some big sharks."

The door opened, and one of Keever's sergeants popped his head round the door. "Our friend Foxy's here, sir."

I rose quickly. "You want me to get lost?"

"You needn't," Keever said. "You might find it interesting. Besides, it's warmer in here." He motioned to the sergeant to show his visitor in.

Foxy entered furtively, whipping off his cloth cap. He had been well nicknamed—a thin, sharp-faced man with a long nose and small close-set eyes.

Keever eyed him keenly. "Well, what's on your mind?"

Foxy's face hardened. "There's something you ought to hear about, Super. You've always treated me fair, like, you and your boys..."

"Never mind testimonial," Keever said.

His visitor, twisting his cap in his hands, went on in a

high-pitched nasal voice: "I thought you might like to know about a certain party aboard the *Holland Queen*." He coughed. "That's the Dutch cargo-ship anchored off Saltmouth waiting to put in."

"Well?" prompted Keever impatiently.

"There's diamonds aboard her."

The Superintendent registered no surprise. He had for years dealt with contraband as part of his daily job.

"You think she's a smuggling ship?"

"I don't know anything about the ship, Guv." Foxy's face grew hard again. "It's a member of the crew what I'm tipping you off about."

Keever drew a scribbling-pad towards him. "What's his name?"

"There you've got me. I don't know."

Keever frowned. "You don't know his name?"

Foxy's jaw set and his eyes glinted. "Look, Guv . . . let me put it this way. There was a party what played me dirty once. I ain't never forgiven him, see? I never knew what his name was. They just called him Whisky. A lot of us don't care to bandy our names about. . . ."

"You don't say!" the Super ironically. "Why Whisky? Is he a Scot?"

"No, English, far as I know. But he's a louse, Super. He did do me real dirty, and I says to myself: 'One day I'll have my own back.' " Foxy wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "And now I've got the chance, Guv . . . the chance to put him behind bars."

Keever said evenly: "You're trying to tell me this Whisky is serving aboard the *Holland Queen* and is bringing in diamonds?—or at any rate is about to try to?"

Foxy nodded. Keever asked: "How do you know?"

His caller hedged. "Well, let's say it was a friendly tip from a cove in the know . . . a bloke who doesn't like Whisky any more than I do."

The Super rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Look," Foxy said grimly, "you could nip out to this Dutch tub and nab this bloke red-handed. As soon as the fog lifts and *Holland Queen* puts in, Whisky will slip through your fingers quick as an eel. He's dead smart."

Keever grunted. "H'm . . . you might be right. But what does he look like? If we don't know his name, how do we spot him?"

Foxy shrugged. "That's the snag. He's an ordinary-looking cove. Nothing special about him. Medium-build, darkish, clean-shaven. . . ."

"That's a big help." Kever doodled on his note-pad, letting his mind tick over. Then he looked up. "If we take a launch to this ship, would you be game to come with us?"

"You mean come aboard and pick him out?"

Kever nodded, and Foxy rounded his lips and sucked in his breath. "It's a tall order, Guv. Whisky's an ugly customer. He'll murder me if he gets the chance." He paused. "Still, I hate his guts. It'd be worth the risk to put him behind bars. I'll come."

"Good man." The Superintendent rose. "Wait outside a bit. My sergeant will fix you up with a cup of char. Meantime I'll arrange for a launch to take us out to the *Holland Queen*."

When the door closed behind Foxy, Kever picked up his phone and arranged for a police-launch to be held in readiness at the landing-stage near the customs-shed. Then, his eyes crinkling, he said: "Ever been on a raid?"

I beamed happily. "You don't mean I'm invited?"

"It's against the rules," he said, "but the *Times* is a useful ally of ours, and I can trust you not to print anything that would get us both into trouble."

I looked out of the window as a deep-throated siren bellowed mournfully, muffled by the yel-

low fog, and Kever said, "Not much of a day for a joy-ride, but all in a day's work. Let's hope we don't hit anything."

About fifteen minutes later, the police launch pattered quietly away from its mooring and across the oily scum-covered water. The wall of fog swallowed us up—Kever, Foxy, Sergeant Mills and myself.

The Sergeant, at the wheel, hummed a tune cheerfully as if he were on a summer holiday on the Broads instead of groping through a winter fog. He knew the waters of Saltmouth like the back of his hand, and no sort of weather held any terror for him.

I've never understood how Mills managed to pinpoint so accurately the position of the *Holland Queen*. We could not have been going more than fifteen or twenty minutes when Mills said: "There she is, sir" and manoeuvred within hailing distance of the bridge.

The Super, his old raincoat buttoned up to his ears, spoke to the skipper through a loud-hailer, and presently—with a complaining Foxy and an eager reporter in his wake—he boarded the cargo-ship to meet a short, bearded, rather nervous-looking man who proved to be Captain van Beeck.

Fortunately van Beeck spoke

English, and Kever, after showing his police credentials, explained his mission.

The Captain said: "I imagine the man you wish to speak to is English. There is only one Englishman in my present crew. He signed on in Amsterdam for a single trip, being anxious to return home, he said. His name is Walker."

"Ah, Walker." The Super glanced at me and smiled. "Is he known as Whisky?"

Van Beeck shook his head. "I have never heard him called that . . . but perhaps that is how he is known to his colleagues in your country?"

"You're darned right he is," Foxy muttered.

"Is he aboard?" Kever asked.

"Of course. He should be in the crew's quarters in the foc'sle, playing cards. This way, please. . . ."

The Captain led us along the ghostly deck in the failing light of dusk. But we only got as far as the first companion-hatch.

We heard a sudden gasp behind us, then a noisy scuffling, and Kever, van Beeck and I spun round swiftly.

Foxy had been trailing apprehensively in our rear—apparently hoping that we should serve as a protective screen between himself and Whisky Walker when we finally tracked the latter down.

But a man had sprung suddenly from behind the hatch-cover and leapt onto Foxy's back. The hoarse gasp had burst from Foxy's throat, and now Foxy and his attacker were struggling violently.

Apparently Walker had overheard us talking, recognized Foxy the Nark, and made his surprise attack.

Two two men were locked together, and we saw Walker—a heavier man than Foxy—pressing his thumb against his victim's neck while the latter gripped his attacker's wrist and frantically tried to pull it away.

We surged forward in a body and dragged the two apart. They stood glaring at each other. Walker was mouthing the foulest oaths, and Foxy was levelling a shaking finger at him, shouting: "That's him! Ask him what he's done with the diamonds! Search him, search his kit . . . see if I ain't right!"

Kever said calmly: "You're Walker?—known as Whisky?"

The man snarled: "That's right . . . so what?"

"I'm Superintendent Kever, Saltmouth Docks Police. We've reason to believe you collected diamonds in Amsterdam and will attempt to pass them to a receiver when the *Holland Queen* puts in."

Walker's face was a study in bewilderment. "Me? I never

dabbled in 'rocks' in my 'ole bleedin' life!"

The Super studied him coldly, and the man pointed at Foxy. "Been spinning you a yarn, has he? He's got it in for me. Trying to settle an old score, that's what he's doing. And you roz-zers listen to him—a lying little rat like *him*!"

Walker spat in Foxy's face, and Kever rapped out: "That'll do!"

"It's all lies, mate! Search me... search my cabin... search my kit... search the flaming ship... I don't care where you look!"

"We're going to do just that," Kever said quietly. "Lead the way, Walker, and if you try any more rough-house, you'll be taken back and charged, got that?"

It was a thorough, painstaking search, in which van Beeck gave his fullest support, but it was quite fruitless. A frustrating half-hour search yielded simply nothing.

"Okay," Kever sighed at length, "that's enough."

Foxy shouted angrily: "Make Whisky tell you where he's hidden them!"

"Shut up!" Kever snapped at him. "I should have known better than to let you bring us on this wild goose chase." He shook van Beeck's hand, thanked him, and said to Foxy

and me: "Come on, we'll get back to the launch."

A bad-tempered Super, a sulking Foxy, and a rather disillusioned reporter rejoined Sergeant Mills in the police-launch. The fast little craft was presently nosing its way back to Saltmouth harbour.

Throughout the trip nobody spoke—not even the cheerful Mills. Kever sat deep in thought, and I glanced at him from time to time, wondering what was going on in that alert, calculating brain of his.

I was to find out much sooner than I had thought, and it happened with a suddenness that took my breath away.

We had left the launch and were walking along the landing jetty towards the customs shed when Kever, without warning, spun upon Foxy and twisted his arm behind his back, making the little informer yell out with pain.

At the same time, the Super dipped into Foxy's jacket pocket and yanked out a small canvas bag whose top was drawn together with string. Keeping his grip on Foxy, he tossed the bag at me and said: "Look in that!"

I opened the bag. "Hell," I exclaimed, "diamonds!"

Kever smiled grimly. "I thought they might be. I did a lot of thinking while I was on the way back."

Foxy whimpered and threw him poisonous looks.

"Very neat, and they nearly pulled it off," Keever said. He looked at me. "Get the idea? Walker and Foxy had it all fixed—even that death-struggle on deck. It was during the fight that Walker slipped the stones into Foxy's pocket. And this is the rich bit . . ."—he let out a laugh—" . . . Foxy was bringing them ashore in a launch kindly supplied by the police!"

As I gave a long whistle, Keever said: "The customs boys will die laughing when they hear this one. Good job they didn't get away with it—we would never have lived it down."

It wasn't long after this that the fog lifted. The *Holland Queen* put in, and Walker, alias Whisky, had the shock of his life when he stepped down the gangplank, to find Keever's men waiting for him.

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In the Next Issue—

## THE WRONG DOOR

*A Rollicking New Novelet of Murder*

by DAVE BISHOFF

*Private eye Harry Clews was nursing a rainy-day hangover in his New York office when the flamboyantly dressed young man laid \$500 on his desk, then took it back at gunpoint after Clews admitted he had not the slightest idea what it was all about. Then came the murder of Frank Christopher down the hall and then came the cops. By the time Clews talked himself clear of the killing, the blonde bombshell was in his office—and by the time he got her figured out, he was in big trouble both with the fuzz and the hoods.*

# Look at the Bright Side

by  
SHARON HERBST



*When a man feels loved by nobody at all, he may be moved to commit murder.*

"HAROLD, there's a bright side to everything, Harold. Let's just call this the purge before purgatory, a cleansing of the soul—whose soul and whose purgatory is, perhaps, questionable. Still, I think it's only fair that you know why you're about to die. Don't you?"

"Surely you're not surprised. You must know how I've detested you all these years. As a matter of fact, I can't really remember when I didn't hate you. You repulse me, Harold, it's that simple.

"I suppose it isn't your fault that you're the epitome of ev-

erything I loathe in a man—timid, insecure, spineless, melancholy—a hallmark of weakness, a quivering facsimile of humanity. Face it, Harold, you're a dull, self-effacing lump of a man caught in the mire of your own stagnation.

"Take a good long look at yourself. Sad, isn't it? Forty-three, pin-headed, paunchy, your features drawn up into a tight, perennial pinch, and your chin so receding that it's almost invisible. You're a beige person, Harold, bland and colorless. Your entire life has been rather like your chin—recessive—with

all the excitement and flavor of homogenized oatmeal. What a pitiful sight!

"Do you suppose Mr. Smythe will miss you, Harold? I sincerely doubt it. You've been his loyal bookkeeper for nineteen years, tucked away in that same dingy broom closet of a back office. He's rarely even acknowledged your presence. But you really never minded, did you? Of course not! Because you're a worm, Harold—no, more like a gray, indistinct slug, who slinks through life wanting nothing more than to be left alone. I ask you, is that living? No!

"You won't miss life, Harold. You've never lived it. It's just as well that you die.

"Oh—am I being too harsh with you? I can't help it, you're so easy to abuse. Look at you, standing there so meek and mouselike. Anyone else would put up a fight! You, Harold—you just stare back at me mutely. It's just as well. I'd rather you didn't apologize anymore for your failings. Let's have no more boot-licking in this lifetime.

"Besides, I'm not saying you

don't have *any* redeeming qualities, Harold. There are a couple—you've always had a fairly good mind and, of course, you were unquestionably devoted to your dear mother. Ah, Mother! You miss her terribly, don't you? After all, she was the only woman who ever cared anything at all about you. She appreciated you for what you were and didn't demand otherwise of you, and you loved her for that. But she's gone now, Harold, and you're all alone. All alone—and dismally lonesome . . .

"Oh it's ridiculous for me to go on like this. I've said all I need to. It's time, don't you think. Your life's been one big flop, Harold. Let's at least make the end a grand finale. You know what to do—pick up the razor blade. All right now, two quick slashes. *Good!* Now, Harold, take a last look. Rather comical, isn't it? A grown man who's just slit his wrists standing in front of the bathroom mirror talking to his reflection.

"Mother, please don't be angry with me—look at the bright side, I'll be with you in just a little while."

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# Guerre De Plume



The letters came, and one by one came true. Yet no one in Muzzy's crowd could help him. Or would.

**by FRANK SISK**

AT TEN A.M. on a recent Friday the executive suite of the Yankee Traders Corporation was occupied by Marco Maresca and August Rose.

Maresca was seated behind a spacious blond desk with nothing

on it except a green leather-cornered blotter, a big blue ceramic ashtray and a big black butane lighter. He was working a fat cigar from one corner of his rattrap mouth to the other, his puffy eyes narrowed in thought.

Rose was sitting on the edge of an overstuffed chair against the stippled white wall ten feet away, a pocket-sized notebook in his left hand, a ballpoint pen held in his right.

"Okay, Muzzy," Rose said. "What you want to do is write off that carload of cheese as a total loss. Okay?"

"Okay," Maresca said. "Just one thing, Gus. Make damn sure it looks legit. I don't want them tax cats crawling around here no more."

"No glitch, Muzzy. Count on it. We got a field inspector playing in our yard now. Let's see. What's next on the agenda?" Rose consulted his small notebook. "Oh yeah. These five hundred cases of bonded bourbon."

"The hijacked stuff?"

"The stuff we reported hijacked. Where do you want it distributed, Muzzy?"

Maresca shifted the cigar. "Move three hundred cases to Montreal and two hundred to Toronto. Them boys'll make a nice buck on it, hot or cold. But get it outta the country by tomorrow night, Gus."

"Done. Five hundred to the Canadian pushke. What do you want to pay Jiggs Curran and Frenchy?"

"Two K split down the middle," Maresca said. "And tell them what a good job they did but don't use my name. I think I got

another thing in the works for them next week."

"Done," Rose said, closing the book and sliding it into a pocket of his tweed sport coat. "That's all I had, Muzzy."

"Good. Why'n't you pour yourself a drink now?"

"Don't mind if I do. What about yourself?"

"Yeah, pour me some of that cognac, the special bottle Herman sent over."

Rose got nimbly to his feet and was walking toward the small service bar in a corner of the room when the door from the outer office opened and a comely young lady came in. She wore her fair hair to her shoulders. She wore a white sweater and a black skirt, both of which were amply countoured, and carried a handful of paper.

"Good morning, Mister Rose," she said, ignoring the way his eyes were taking inventory. "Good morning, Mister Maresca. The day's mail except for the junk I weeded out."

"Thanks, Angie." Maresca's gaze wandered slowly from the dimple in her chin to the smooth-looking knees. "Junk I don't need."

"There's one letter here you probably don't need either," Angie said, placing the handful of paper on the green blotter.

"Yeah? Which one?"

"That plain sheet of typewriter

paper. It came in the plain white envelope that's clipped to it."

"Well, what's it all about?" Maresca glanced down at it.

"I think you better read it yourself, sir."

"Sure, Angie, if you say so," Maresca said as he reached for the opened letters.

"Yes. Now is there anything else?"

"I'll buzz if I think of something."

Smiling brightly, Angie turned and left.

"That's class, Muzzy," Rose said, pouring drinks. "Real class."

"Which puts her outta your class, Gus," Maresca said. "Don't you forget it."

"Private stock already?"

"Not yet. But one a these days. I even warned Ronnie off her. My own son."

With a faint smile Rose carried the drinks across the room. "You think you really got a chance with a chick like that, Muzzy?"

"A chick's a chick once you get the feathers off," Maresca accepted the pony of cognac. "And I don't take no for an answer too long, Gus. You know that."

"So I'll even drink to it," Rose raised his own pony. "To Miss Angelina Marino and Mister Marco Maresca. An item, as Walter Winchell used to say."

"Yeah," Maresca said and then downed the cognac in one gulp,

removing the cigar from his mouth only long enough to do so. At the same time he found the letter Angie had referred to and he began to study it with an expression that was first ruminative, then incredulous, finally ferocious.

"Sumabitch! Who the? Why the goddamn bastard! Wait'll I. For cryssake. Gus, this is one for the concrete feet. What I mean. Take a gander. Read it out loud. Some of them words is just too much, man."

August Rose was one of the favored few who knew that Maresca regarded a written word of three syllables or more as a mean thimblerrigging device. Rose took the proffered sheet. Studying it a few seconds, he then said, "You want me to read this whole thing, Muzzy?"

Cigar clamped between stained teeth, Maresca nodded.

"Well, all right," Rose said. "He comes on pretty strong, doesn't he? 'Dear Signor Maresca, for openers let me tell you what I think of you and your ilk. I think you are an insatiable hog. I think your father must have been a stupid swine. I think your mother must have been a filthy sow. I know your son is a rutting pig. If I had my way I would lead the lot of you to the nearest abattoir and do the world a big favor'—"

"What's that word mean,

Gus?" Maresca asked in a hoarse strangled voice.

"Abattoir?"

"Yeah."

"Slaughterhouse. You know, where they kill animals."

"Sumabitch bast. Go on, go on."

"'You've put up a legitimate front now,'" Rose read, "'but that doesn't fool anybody who has checked out your dirty record. Bookmaking, hijacking, white slavery, pushing horse, busting unions, arson, murdering competition'—"

"This sounds inside from the old days," Maresca said.

"Could be," Rose said.

"Manny Vines. But he's dead. Some hitter cooled him at high noon in Times Square. Go on, Gus."

"'Your fancy front doesn't even fool the klutzes who call themselves cops,'" Rose continued reading, "'but they can't do anything about it. They can't crack down without hard evidence. That's where I'm different. Considerations of due process, as the legal eagles like to say, don't tie my hands. Hence'—"

"Maybe it's some shyster we leaned on," Maresca said, dropping his ragged cigar in the ceramic ashtray.

"Maybe," Rose said. "Want me to finish?"

"Yeah, yeah."

"'As a first step in my war of attrition against you'—"

"Now what the hell zat mean, Gus?"

"It means the first step in wearing you down."

"Wait'll I find out who this creep is. Just wait."

"—war of attrition against you, I plan to strike at Front Number One, namely the greenhouse you operate in the town of Oysterville. More specifically my assault will be directed at that tropically-heated section which shelters your orchids from the current frigid temperatures of February."

"And he signs himself 'sinceramente, Signor Silenzio.' I guess that means silence."

"I'll silence the sumabitch when I get my hands on him," Maresca said. "I better phone Otto and clue him."

He left the desk and was on the way to the bar where the office's sole phone sat in all its pristine redness when Angie opened the outer door and intruded her pretty face.

"Mister Smith is calling on the direct line," she said. "Are you in?"

Maresca nodded grimly and took the red phone in hand. "Put him through." And two seconds later: "Same to you, Otto. What's wrong?" He listened with his eyes gradually narrowing to pig-gish slits. "I get the picture," he said finally. "I'll send out a couple a men."

After hanging up he poured a shot of cognac from Herman's special bottle, tossed it off in one gulp and then said more to himself than to Rose, "Last night, early this morning some parties unknown pitched maybe a dozen bricks through the windows of my orchid house. The weather was prolly zero at the time. Killed everything, everything."

"That's too bad," Rose said.

"That's too bad for somebody," Maresca said.

THERE ARRIVED in the mail on the following Monday another letter signed by Signor Silenzio. Forgathered around Maresca at the time of delivery were Rose and two lowbrows called Jiggs and Frenchy.

All eyes watched goatishly as Angie entered, crossed the room and placed the opened letters on the desk in front of Maresca.

"You've got another one," she said in a cheerful voice.

"Another one of what, Angie?"

"Another of those letters."

"The hell you say," Maresca growled.

"Will that be all, sir?"

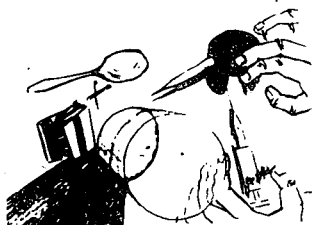
"Yeah."

Three pairs of goatish eyes fondly pursued Angie's nice posterior from the room while the fourth pair read the following:

*Dear Signor Porco,  
By now you know I mean what I*

*say, orchidaceously speaking, but that little gesture was only the beginning. I am not alone. I have many allies because you have made many enemies.*

*Even those you think are to be trusted would knife you in the back if the chance should come. Yes, even a shlemiel like Herman Glazer who tries to hide his true feelings about you behind expensive bottles of cognac. But poor old Herman has limits to his patience. If you don't believe this, just try that second bottle of cognac that he sent over the other day.*



Maresca raised his eyes.

"What is it this time, Muzzy?"

Rose asked.

"I'll tell ya later. First, let's have a little drink. How about it, boys?"

"I could use an eye-opener," Frenchy said.

"How about a taste of fancy cognac?" Maresca asked on his way to the bar.

"That's for me," Frenchy said.

"Make mine like a rye if you got it, Boss," Jiggs said.

"Sure I got it. What about you, Gus?"

"It's kind of early. Make mine creme de menthe."

Behind the bar, hands out of sight, Maresca poured a pony of cognac and set it aside for himself. Then he broke the seal on the second bottle and poured another pony. When all the drinks were poured he placed them atop the bar and said, "Come and get it. I aint no waiter yet."

The men approached, took their respective glasses in hand, raised them in wordless toast and downed the contents.

"How you like that cognac, Frenchy?" Maresca asked.

"Not bad," Frenchy said, fingers giving his cheek a twist of approval and then he turned suddenly pale and fell forward on his face.

That afternoon Maresca summoned Angie into his office and told her to sit down and make herself comfortable.

"I'd just as soon stand," she said.

"Stand. Sit. Who cares?" Maresca slipped a fresh cigar in his mouth and lit it with the big butane instrument on his desk. "What I want to get across, kiddo, is keep your yap shut on on anything you seen here this morning."

"You mean Frenchy being carried out?"

"Things like that," Muzzy said.

"That's all I saw, sir—Jiggs Curran helping Frenchy to the elevator." Angie smiled faintly.

"Well, Frenchy had a little heart attack. That's all. Only I don't want the word to get around. Bad for business."

"I see."

"Good, Angie. You keep seeing that way and you're due for a bonus the end of the month," Maresca promised.

"I don't need a bonus, Mister Maresca. You pay me a good salary."

"I'll pay you a lot better you work overtime a few days a week."

"I seem to get all my work done easily during regular hours, sir."

"What I mean, Angie, is special assignments. Special. Get it?" He grinned at her.

"I don't believe I do," she said.

"Like tonight. You and me take a nice bite in a private club I belong to. Okay?"

"I'm afraid I can't, sir."

"Why the hell not?" Maresca growled.

"My father expects me home."

"So what? Gim a buzz and tell him you got better things to do, baby."

"Sorry. Poppa's in very poor health. His asthma, you know." Angie sounded firm.

"Don't tell me. I know Gino's asthma from way back. Some soldier, your old man. He used

to breathe heavy running numbers."

"He can't help it, Mister Maresca," Angie said with some asperity. "It's an affliction he was born with."

"Yeah." Maresca swiveled the cigar through a wolfish grin. "But he might not die of it, kid. Think that one over a couple a days."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean next time I ask you for some overtime, Angie, I won't take no for an answer."

The next morning, Tuesday, August Rose was waiting in the outer office, chatting with Angie, when Marco Maresca arrived. Around his cigar he wore a wide smile.

"How's your old man's asthma?" he asked.

Angie said, "Same as ever."

"Early bird," he said to Rose

"For a good reason," Rose said.

"Yeah. What is it?"

"Confidential, Muzzy."

"Come on inside then."

Closing the office door behind him, Rose said, "I hate to tell you this, Muzzy, but I got a negative from the cousin."

"A negative? What you mean a negative?" Maresca shifted his cigar in his mouth.

"A definite negative."

"What's he want? More bread?" Maresca asked.

"It's not that, Muzzy. He won't hit Herman Glazer."

Maresca nearly bit his cigar in two. "Why not?"

"Because he's on Herman's payroll already."

Maresca raised his eyebrows. "Since when?"

"Since yesterday or the day before, Muzzy."

"Doing what? He don't know nothing but guns and ice picks."

"He's got a contract, Muzzy."

"You mean Herman, gutless Herman, he's handing out contracts now? I don't hardly believe it. Who's he think done him wrong, Gus?"

"You, Muzzy," Rose said in a nervous whisper.

"Me? You mean that creepy cousin of yours—"

"He's a third cousin only, Muzzy. Not a real blood relative at all."

"Look!" barked Maresca. "If you don't sidetrack that lame-brain—and *fast*—your blood won't look no different than his."

"What do you want me to do?" Rose asked calmly.

"What I want you to do is bust his knees or something. Get him out of circulation. I already have enough on my mind, trying to look legit, without worrying about your goddamn cousin every time I pass a dark alley."

"I'll try talking to him again."

"You do that, Gus. Right now."

MARCO MARESCA customarily ate lunch at the Valhalla Club. Often

he was accompanied by a lady or a reasonable facsimile thereof. Today, however, he changed this routine.

He was profoundly troubled by the fact that Herman Glazer had put out a contract on him before he could put out a contract on Herman Glazer.

He was further troubled by the latest communique from Signor Silenzio which had arrived in the morning post shortly after August Rose's cousin-seeking departure from the offices of the hard pressed Yankee Traders Corporation.

Signor Silenzio had made two points: 1) he begged to inform Signor Porco that the proper authorities had now been informed where they could find the body of one Armand Doucette AKA Frenchy, which had been unceremoniously dumped down a manhole and 2) he strongly suggested that Signor Porco inspect any vehicle in which he planned to ride, just in case somebody had attached an explosive device to the flywheel.

Muttering such words as *bastardo* and *segugio* and *moffetta*, Maresca had ignited Silenzio's letter with the butane lighter and watched it turn to flakes of carbon in the blue ashtray.

But he had taken its advice to heart. Prior to going to lunch he'd had his driver, a squat bowlegged man named Bill, check the

flywheel of his limousine as well as the fuel tank, the carburetor, the battery, the spark plugs and the brakes. Then, and only then, had he climbed into the back seat, sitting between two burly bodyguards, and given the order to proceed not to the Valhalla Club but to the April in Paris Cafe where the hamburger was called bifteck.

All along the route his piggish eyes had darted nervously left and right, probing alleys, scanning empty doorways and blank windows. At the April in Paris Cafe he sat in the rear with his back to the wall and ordered onion soup and a double serving of curried frogs' legs, which were described on the menu as *Grenouilles a l'Indienne*. The bodyguards ordered, and got, pepperone pizza.

At four o'clock that afternoon Angie opened the door and let August Rose into Maresca's presence.

"Good news, Muzzy," Rose announced, grinning.

"I need some," Maresca said.

"The cousin has left town."

"For how long?"

"Long enough, Muzzy. Take my word on it."

"What'd you have to break?" Maresca asked.

"Not a thing. I got him in a corner of his favorite delicatessen, bought him a corned beef on rye and did a small amount of

tricky shmoozing. Now he's on a plane to San Juan."

"How much?"

"Not much at all. The round-trip ticket and a K for the casinos."

An expression of porcine satisfaction worked its way across Maresca's face. He took a small key from his vest pocket, inserted it in the desk's middle-drawer keyhole and turned it. Opening the drawer, he took out a five by eight pink card, tapped it twice against the fingertips of his left hand and then slid it across the blotter.

Rose watched without moving a muscle.

"Take it," Maresca said. "You earned it back, Gus."

Rose still didn't move.

"You know what it is, don't ya?" Maresca asked.

"One of my markers?"

"One of your markers. For ten K. Pick it up."

"Thanks, Muzzy." Rose took the card from the blotter and put it in his coat pocket. "It's been a long time."

"I still got three more," Maresca said, glancing down into the desk drawer before closing and locking it. "Total of fifty-five K."

"That much?"

"Not counting interest, Gus. Like I told you a year ago. Keep your nose clean and I don't charge interest. I catch you bet-

ting the horses again and I lean on you hard."

"Listen, Muzzy. I been to the track only twice all year. Both times with you. And the two-dollar window was my limit. You know that."

"It's not the track worries me. It's the street action. Now getting back to Herman Glazer." Moresca said, dismissing the subject. "I want another hit man."

"Got one in mind?"

"How about Dude Kunkel?"

"Last I heard he was in Vegas," Rose said.

"Send him a signal, Gus."

"Done, Muzzy," Rose agreed.

"We'll drink to it."

They went to the bar, Maresca doing the honors. When he uncorked a cognac bottle, Rose's face registered a wrinkle of worry.

Maresca chuckled. "This is the pure stuff, Gus. The stuff with the spike in it—" he reached beneath the bartop and brought up a nearly full bottle—"here it is. See that ink line under the proof? I put that there."

"Wouldn't it be safer to pour the damned stuff down the drain?" Rose asked, still nervous.

"Prolly. But one of these days a shot from this bottle might be just what the doctor ordered. Salute!"

"Salute"

They downed their drinks.

Wednesday morning was the

time Marco Maresca regularly held a staff meeting with his button men. There were five such men present on this Wednesday, the sixth having been permanently removed from office after certain defalcations were discovered in his territory.

Each was reporting on the status of shylocking, bookmaking and numbers, and backing up these reports with coded records and cash receipts, when there was a discreet knock on the door.

"Yeah," said Maresca.

The door opened and Angie's pretty face showed. "Do you want something special from the morning mail, sir?"

"Something special?"

"You know what I mean."

"That again? Bring it in."

Angie strode bravely forward through a gauntlet of piercing eyes, handed Maresca the typewritten sheet and bravely retired. Silence ensued as Maresca, scowling, began painstakingly to read the following:

*Dear Signor Porco,*

*A certain party's cousin is now in Puerto Rico, thanks to your powers of persuasion. Thus you have temporarily averted the fate sly old Herman Glazer has in store for you.*

*Now Herman has taken a different tack. He plans not only to waste you but also to take along the young shmuck you call your*

*son. Arrangements are underway even now to get both of you together in one place for a long ride. How about that?*

*Con soddisfazione,  
Silenzio*

Maresca's scowl, as he read, had deepened to an angry welt. The smoke curling from his cigar might conceivably have been emanating from the pores of his face. His eyes burned.

Who in hell was this sumabitch Silenzio anyway? he was asking himself. Bastard must be hiding in the goddamn air conditioning.

His burning eyes began to search the faces of the assembled button men one by one—and one by one they writhed uncomfortably. At the same time he touched the hot end of his cigar to the typewritten letter. As it began to crumple under flame he dropped it into the ashtray. The button men looked on, mouths buttoned up.

Just then a commotion sounded in the outer office. A man's insistent voice and then a feminine laugh and then masculine laughter. Maresca left his desk and walked ominously to the door and flung it open.

"What in hell you doing here?" he demanded of somebody out of sight.

"I got a telegram," a masculine voice replied.

"You got a what?"

"A telegram. Like from Western Union. Over the phone. Here, Poppa, I wrote it all down. I made the girl read it twice."

"Come in here, stupid," Maresca said.

A young man with shoulder-length black hair entered. Several of the button men recognized him as Ronald Maresca, Muzzy's one and only son, God help Muzzy.

"Now what's this about a telegram?" Maresca asked.

The young man took a scrap of paper from the tote bag he was wearing over his shoulder and said, "Here it is, Poppa. Shall I read it?"

"If you can read your own writing, yeah."

"It says, 'Your father wishes you to be at his office no later than ten-thirty this morning. He plans to take you and Miss Marino on a boat excursion up the Hudson. Be prompt.' And it's signed by somebody named Silenzio. One of your, uh, staff, I suppose."

"You suppose wrong," Maresca was shaking his head in utter disbelief. "Boat excursion up the Hudson? In the middle of winter with hunks of ice floating. For cryssake, what kind a nut you think I am?"

"Why, I never gave it a thought, Poppa."

"You never gave nothing a thought, stupid. Whyn't ya call



me on the phone? Find out if I slipped a cog or something?"

"You told me never to phone to here."

"That's about the only thing I ever told you not to do that, goddamn, you dint do." Maresca's parental bafflement suddenly yielded to a look of consternation. "Glazer! Yeah, he's got us together here. Jeez!"

"What's the matter, Poppa?" Ronnie asked.

"I got to get you outta here fast, boy. Outta the country even."

Maresca took a key case from one of his pockets and hurried across the room to a paneled door. He unlocked and opened it. Inside was a small but impressive arsenal. He was helping himself to an automatic rifle and a box of ammunition when a strange voice spoke authoritatively.

"My name is Lieutenant Cris-

tobal. With me is Sergeant Schreiber."

Cigar drooping, Maresca turned from the closet and saw two middle-aged men in felt hats and sloppy suits standing in his office, one an inch or so taller than the other.

"We didn't send for ya," Maresca said.

"You better put that rifle down," the taller man said, producing a revolver.

"This is a place of business," Maresca said, leaning the rifle against the wall.

"It looks it," the man with the revolver said, casting a glance at the piles of cash and the ledger records on the desk. "And these gentlemen—" he gave the button men a malignant smile—"are members of the Board of Directors, I guess."

"You can't come in here without a search warrant," Maresca said.

"Show him the warrant," the taller man said. "It gives us specific authority to search for three types of evidence: money obtained by criminal means, illegal weapons and poisoned liquor used to kill one Armand Doucette, parttime employe known as Frenchy of the Yankee Traders Corporation. . ."

About an hour later August Rose arrived at the offices of the Yankee Traders Corporation and, noticing the door to the in-

ner sanctum wide open, he cocked an inquiring eyebrow at Angie, who was sitting at her desk with a broad smile on her pretty face.

"Where's Muzzy and the boys?" he asked.

"As if you didn't know," Angie said.

"What exactly do you mean by that, little mavin?"

"That's what I mean, Mister Rose. Those Yiddish words you use all the time."

"Go on."

"In those letters to Mister Maresca I spotted them right away. I even noted them down." She opened a shorthand book. "Klutz, that was in the first letter. Shlemiel was in the second. None in the third. In the fourth there was shmuck." She looked up brightly. "I don't understand why Mister Maresca didn't catch on too."

"He's a shtup, that's why," Rose said.

"Now what are you going to do?"

"I think I'll visit a cousin in Puerto Rico," Rose said. "By tomorrow the Eastsiders'll be consolidating this operation with their own. What about you, Angie?"

"I'm taking my father's advice and getting a straight job," she said.

"How's your father's asthma?"

"It'll be improving now."

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